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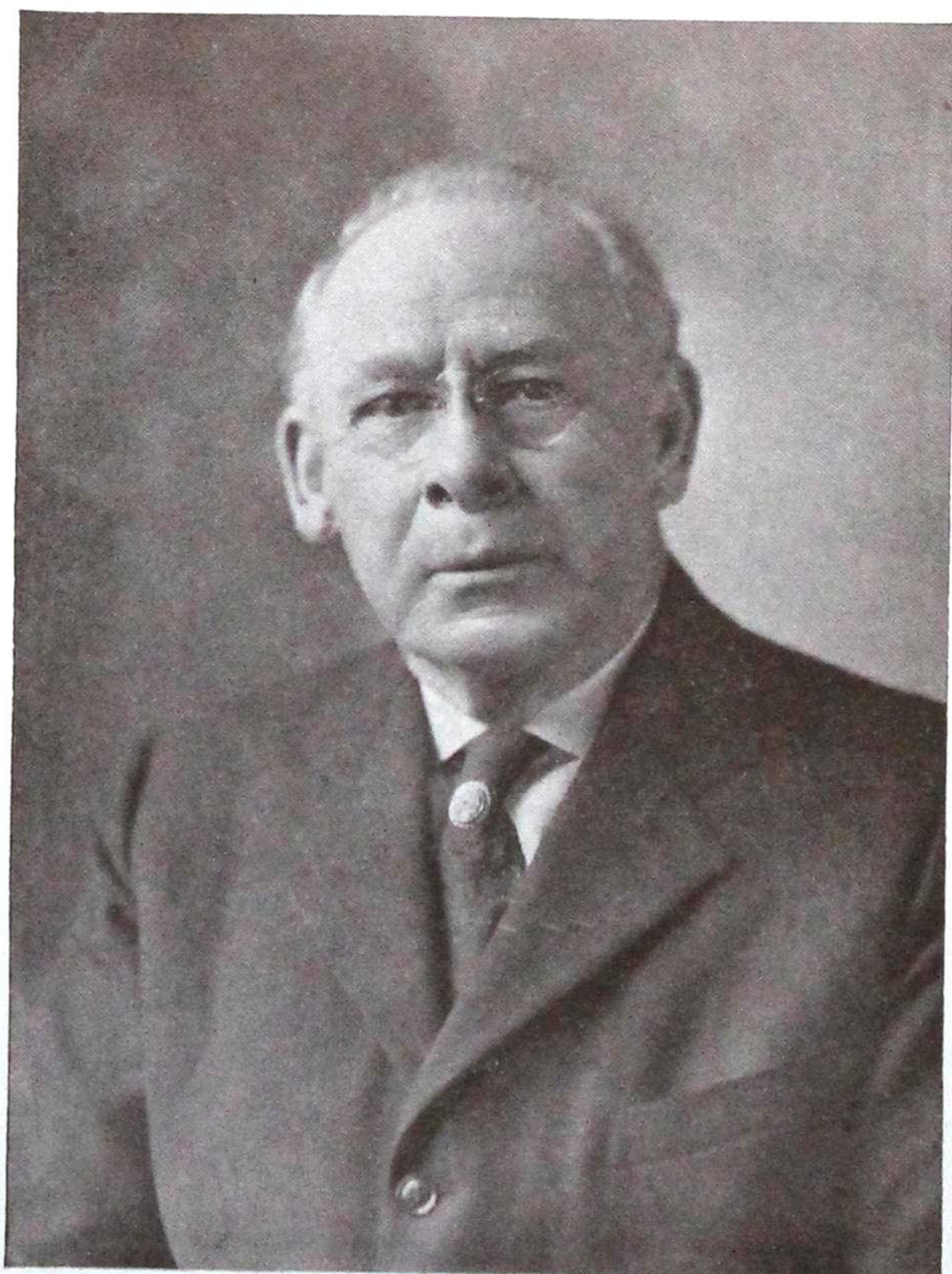


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COTTON NOE





# Tip Sams Again

*A selection of poems by*  
COTTON NOE

Lexington, Kentucky  
University of Kentucky  
Press, 1947

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*To My Wife*  
*Sidney Stanfill Noe*



## PREFATORY NOTE

**T**IP SAMs, Eph Anderson, and other people characterized in these poems are not imaginary, but real individuals, only slightly fictionalized, whom I have known and loved. They constituted a part of the warp and woof of life in the communities where they lived. Sophisticated civilization through the motor car and radio has invaded every nook and corner of our country, and is rapidly reducing the people of rural districts to routine and a common level, thereby robbing life of much of its interest and color. It has been my purpose to preserve in these poems, as far as possible, some of the humor, philosophy, and individuality of such characters as O'Shea, Pegleg Jack, and Thin Britches Dick, each of whom made a kind of contribution to the history of his time and the community in which he lived; and if art is, as has been said, "a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect," then the poems characterizing Ragged Eddy, Umbrella Jim, Fiddling Mose, as well as Lincoln, Daniel Boone, Josh Jenkins, and Junebug Johnny, are art, however crude the workmanship may seem to be. And if the quest of art is beauty, whatever others may see in these characters, I have found beauty and inspiration in their lives. A log cabin is not a Parthenon or Milan Cathedral, but because of human associations with these humble structures, the sight of one may sometimes bring a flutter of joy or a lump to the throat of him who has known and loved the humble folk who dwell therein.

These poems have been selected from my seven published volumes and recent poems, many of which have appeared in *The Step Ladder*, *Westminster Magazine*, *The American Bard*, and other publications. In making a final volume of

verse, I have found it hard to omit some fifty or more poems which I should like to include, but the volume is already a large one.

C. N.

*Beverly Hills, California*  
*March 1, 1946*

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*I*

*PROEM*



## *Miron the Poet*

### I

THEY could not understand this man,—  
In morals, strictest puritan,  
Who almost never went to church;  
But spent his Sunday hours in search  
Of bluets, wild forget-me-nots  
And shy arbutus, found in spots  
Known only to the loving eye.  
Sometimes for half a day he'd lie  
Beneath an elm or maple tree  
And watch a wren or chickadee  
Preparing for the marriage vows—  
Building a nest among the bows.  
And then again he might be found  
Agaze at landscape sun-embrowned,  
Or crimsoned in the autumn glow,  
Or wreathed in drifts of winter snow.  
I've seen him with his ear a-tilt  
As if he heard a brand new lilt  
Of mockingbird in merry mood,  
Singing from yonder near-by wood.  
Content to be forever poor,  
The business world had little lure  
For him who loved the solitudes,  
The sylvan and poetic moods;  
Who shunned the crowds and lived apart,  
And hoarded beauty in his heart.

### II

He never knew what Darwin said,  
What Moses wrote he never read,

But every night he bared his head  
In adoration of the stars;  
And every morning when the bars  
Of darkness tumbled down, he fled  
To mountain tops whence he could see  
The super-human jubilee  
Of dawn, till earth and every tree  
Were filled with fire and song that seemed  
An anthem of the world redeemed.  
Thus Miron walked with God and knew  
That Nature's miracles are true;  
That sin is blindness of the soul,  
Which love of beauty can make whole.

### III

Hollyhocks around his home—high heaven's benefice—  
Flared like rhododendrons on a mountain precipice,  
Purple, violet and crimson, blue and velvet red—  
Humble little cottage, but a royal flower bed.  
Pink and yellow roses and carnations took your breath,  
Dark-eyed little pansies looking like the Head o' Death;  
Golden-rayed sunflowers lifting giant eyes of brown,  
Filled the heart with wonder and the garden with renown.

Miron, Poet, God's anointed, watched the petals blow;  
Read the flower cryptographs his prose friends couldn't know;  
Heard the fairies on the air from some far ocean shore,  
Magic isle beyond the sunset, called Forevermore.  
Village sages often saw him lying in the shade  
Gazing where the rainbow vapors wrought a rich brocade—  
Tapestries of gold and silver on a field of blue;  
Heard him murmur softly riddles no one ever knew.

And the sages pitied Miron, thinking of the end  
In a world of cold hard facts he couldn't comprehend,  
Seeing nothing else but beauty; living in a trance;  
Dreaming epics, writing lyrics, rhapsodies, romance!  
Now the village sages sleep beneath neglected stones—  
Weather-beaten, moss-grown slabs above forgotten bones.  
Miron has an obelisk, emblazoned with his fame—  
Gift of many brilliant pens to an immortal name.



*II*

*CHARACTER AND FOLK  
POEMS*







## *Tip Sams*

### I

TIP SAMs had twins  
And a razorback sow,  
Five dogs and a mule  
And an old roan cow;  
A bone-spavined filly  
And a one-room house,  
And a little wrinkled woman  
Just as meek as a mouse.  
Old Tip raised tobacco  
And he trafficked in skins,  
For he had seven sons  
In addition to the twins;  
And every mother's son  
And the little mammy, Jude,  
Smoked a pipe all day,  
And the twins both chewed.  
But Tip kept adigging  
And he never lost heart,  
For the dogs hunted rabbits  
And they caught a right smart;  
And the bone-spavined filly  
And the mule pulled a plow,  
And they lived off the givings  
Of the old roan cow,  
And the acorn-fattened farrow  
Of the razorback sow.  
But here the story closes  
Of this little romance,  
For the seven sons are sleeping  
On the battlefields of France;

But their daddy grows tobacco  
And trafficks still in skins,  
And the little wrinkled mammy  
Has another pair of twins.

## II

Tip Sams' second twins  
Are twenty-one today,  
And the little wrinkled mammy  
Is feeble now and gray.  
The older twins enlisted young  
And one was lost at sea;  
The other's in the army still  
Way out in Hawaii.  
Old Tip himself is tottery  
But he still carries on  
Though the bone-spavined filly  
And old faithful Jack are gone.  
Tip tries to raise tobacco,  
And he trafficks some in skins,  
But it's hard to make the raffle  
With assistance of the twins.  
The dogs that hunted rabbits  
And caught them in the snow,  
Passed on to other hunting  
In the happy long ago.  
He still gets the givings  
Of an old roan cow,  
And he has some scrawny farrow  
Of a razorback sow;  
But the mast each year is lighter,  
And the pigs are mighty thin,  
And with varmints ever fewer,

How much longer can he win?  
His muscles now are flabby  
And time has dimmed his sight,  
But oh, what a tragedy  
If he should lose the fight,—  
The fight with dire poverty  
In a country rich in gold—  
This hero of great battlefields,  
Now growing frail and old—  
This patriot who gave his all  
To save democracy,—  
His weary toil, his seven sons  
Who sleep beyond the sea—  
Yet worships still the precious flag  
Unfurled in Freedom's air,  
And prays his God with bleeding heart  
To keep it ever there.



## *Isham McClurg*

I SEE old Isham where he's sitting  
By his little cabin door;  
Now ten years since Dinah left him  
For the shining golden shore;  
Left poor Isham, but he's dreaming  
With his head bowed deep and low,  
Thinking always now of Dinah  
And the happy long ago.

Long his kinky wool was creamy,  
Now as white as any snow,  
And his eyes are red and dreamy,  
Thinking of the long ago.  
Marster sleeps beneath the ivy,  
Missus where the daisies blow;  
Near them Dinah, and old Isham's  
Dreaming of the long ago;

Thinking of the days when Dinah  
Won old Missus's heart and praise  
With her dainty, tempting dishes  
And her old-time well-bred ways;  
When his own black arm was brawny,  
Swift the step that now is slow;  
When he stole the heart of Dinah,  
In the happy long ago.

And old Marster—did you know him,  
Colonel Richard James McClurg?  
Wounded twice at Chickamauga,  
Lost an arm at Gettysburg.

Freed his slaves before the outbreak,  
But they followed him to war;  
Two were killed defending Colonel,  
Fighting like the Norse God Thor.

Three returned to live with Marster,  
Isham dreams at ninety-four;  
Do not wake him, he is living  
In the days that are no more;  
Rolling acres stretching Northward  
Like an undulating sea;  
Herds that grazed the Bluegrass woodlands  
Noted for their pedigree;

Manor house a stately mansion,  
Massive rooms and spacious halls,  
Home of chivalry and beauty,  
Hospitality and balls.  
Hunts that lasted through a fortnight,  
Men and women in the chase;  
Blooded hounds as well as horses,  
Outstripped Reynard in the race.

Harvest time and big corn shuckings,  
Crops all in before the snow;  
'Possum feasts and sweet potatoes  
Till the winter moon is low.  
Scenes like these in old Kentucky,  
Common sixty years ago,  
Pass through Isham's aged dreaming  
Like a panoramic show.

What care they for such romances,  
Negroes versed in modern lore?

Just a fool is poor old Isham  
Dozing by his cabin door.  
Ah, I know why Isham's dreaming  
Where the gourd vines twine and grow,  
He is living still with Dinah,  
In the happy long ago.



## *Wagoner Joe*

WAGONER JOE had a three-horse team  
And a country moving van.  
The big dappled bay and the flea-bitten gray  
Each had a double name,—  
Angela Gyp and Lightfoot Dan  
(Reversing the order of same);  
And the little black mare  
That he bought in Adair  
Was Annie Maria Mayme.

Of course I know you wouldn't esteem  
Either mare or the horse a beautiful dream  
Like a highbred Bluegrass span.  
They hadn't the form, the color, the speed,  
Though Angela Gyp was pedigreed,  
And so was Lightfoot Dan.  
But pedigrees don't always count  
In a scrub plow horse or blooded mount,  
And sometimes even in man.  
But little did Wagoner Joseph care.  
He didn't attend the county fair,  
And never had seen a race.  
No loafing or fishing for Wagoner Joe,  
Or riding with hounds in the chase.  
With a faith supreme he followed the gleam  
Of a star none other could see.

Out in the wind, the rain and the snow,  
Whatever the weather might be;  
Scorning the heat of the noonday beam,  
Or under the moon's soft glow,

Driving his wonderful three-horse team,  
Humming forever the same old theme,  
Mystical Wagoner Joe:

A hunter who fondles his faithful gun,  
A fiddler who plays the fiddle for fun,  
He loved the sound of rattling wheel,  
The pull of the lines, the sense, the feel  
Of rhythmical step, the click of the shoe  
Singing a song forever new,  
The warp and woof of a dream.

It follows, of course, that Wagoner Joe  
Was never considered rich.

His charges were always reasonably low,  
Collections uncertain and usually slow,  
Either of which,  
You probably know  
Will land a man in the ditch.

But Joe never counted his riches in cash,  
Or measured his wealth in coins,  
And nobody thought of a silken sash  
As girding the wagoner's loins.  
The essence of something finer than this,  
Of something eluding analysis,  
Inspires and guides the artist's brush  
And puts the soul in the song of the thrush.

Thus humble and poor, but glorified,  
Wagoner Joe rode Lightfoot Dan,  
With the little black mare by his side,  
And Angela Gyp in reach of the whip,  
Hitched to the end of the tongue,  
Singing a song content has sung  
Since first the world began.



Joe tended a little patch of ground  
And hauled for people for miles around,  
And moved folks here and there,—  
Cutsinger up in the edge of Boyle,  
Stinnitt way down in Adair—  
Always looking for better soil.  
Moved them probably late in the fall,  
And back again in the spring,—  
Gypsy tenants hearing the call—  
Birds that perched for a brief survey  
Watching the farmers at work in the hay,  
Then off again on the wing.

But Wagoner Joe moved steadily on,  
Singing to Angela Gyp.  
Like a mother caressing a petulant child,  
Threatening to smite with many a quip,  
And an oath or two as a *sine qua non*,  
But Angela knew and her ladyship smiled,  
That Wagoner Joe only reviled,  
And never would use the whip.

Thus and forever the three-horse team  
Hitched to a moving van,—  
Angela Gyp and Lightfoot Dan,  
And the little black dame  
With the triple name,  
The old man's joy and pride,—  
Annie Maria Mayme.  
From early morn till eventide,  
Wagoner Joe beatified,  
Dreaming his lifelong dream.

## *Eph Anderson*

EPH ANDERSON, forspent, forlorn,  
Took from the wall his old foxhorn  
And blew an awful blast,  
Till every hound that heard the sound  
Of every breed and caste,  
Yellow, grizzly, black and tan,  
Untrained pup and veteran,  
Old and fat, and young and thin,  
Came yelping, trooping in.

And Eph who knew he held the key  
That unlocked dog psychology,  
Now made a speech to them—  
In brevity a gem:

“My little crap of corn,”  
He said, “has failed.”  
At this an old hound wailed.  
“My baccer’s felt the blight.”  
Here howling rent the night.  
His voice grew husky now.  
“Yet we must live, but how?  
The mast this year is light.  
But boys and girls, I know a den  
A mile from here beyond the glen  
Where two big foxes live.  
Goldstein told me that he would give  
A hundred for the two.  
Do what you can.”

Old Sol had sensed the cue.  
The overture began.

A whine as thin as clarinet,  
And then a deep-mouthed baritone,  
And Eph was left alone.

All night the woodlands rang:  
Soprano, bass; solo, duet,  
Ensemble and a great quartet.  
Eph listened till his eyes were wet.

Next day the dogs were fed.  
A silver hide  
Worth half a hundred hung beside  
A crown of golden sang.  
Old Ephriam bowed his trembling head:  
"We thank Thee, Lord, for bread."



## *Umbrella Jim*

UMBRELLA JIM,  
About the time I knew him best,  
Was probably somewhere between  
Thirty and forty years of age,  
Tall and slim,  
A fellow of the Whistler type,  
With infinite depth of eyes,  
Blue and ripe  
And healing, as late June skies.  
Nobody ever would have guessed,  
Looking into that serene  
Countenance,  
That Jim was anything but a sage,  
And that is how I classified him at a glance,—  
That is in advance  
Of any information concerning him  
And his life's romance;  
But Jim  
Was something more  
Than just a sage.  
Whether from heritage  
Or long experience under the open sky,  
I can not tell,  
But like the recondite Tagore,  
He was poet as well  
And a poet high  
In Nature's councils and lore,  
And intimate in her dreams,  
As birds and trees and streams  
Could testify.  
Still so far as I know

Jim never wrote a line  
Of poetry in all of his career.  
But he read it everywhere,—  
In flaming columbine,  
In magic mistletoe,  
In Tennyson and Keats and Poe,  
In Shelley and Lanier,—  
He read it everywhere,  
In golden sheaf and falling leaf,  
In earth and sea and air.

Once I heard a fellow say,  
Who really didn't know Jim,  
"I can't find an adequate synonym  
To express my contempt for such fellahs  
As him,—  
I mean the chap who fixes old umbrellahs,"  
Referring, of course, to Umbrella Jim.  
And Jim had that very day  
Repaired this man's silk umbrella,  
And charged him only a dime,  
Although it took a lot of his time  
He could have used in moving onward  
Toward a warmer clime,  
For Jim always went south in the fall,  
Exactly like a migratory bird.  
I think he must have felt or heard  
The call  
And turned southward early in September,  
For I remember  
He always reached our town with the grackle;  
And somehow I came to associate the cackle  
Of the blackbirds with Umbrella Jim.



But nothing in my opinion would have pleased him  
Better than just that.  
The only time I ever saw him lose his head,  
Or even frown,  
Was once, when a fellow, blind as a bat,  
To everything that Jim was looking at,  
Cursed and said:  
"Why don't you get a job and go to work?"  
It was a biting and unjust remark,  
And Jim resented it.  
His brow grew dark;  
He dropped his tinker's kit,  
And gave his vest an angry jerk;  
But in a moment more was just himself again,  
As he looked up and saw a little wren,  
Pirouetting from limb to limb,  
And flirting, it seemed to me, with Umbrella Jim.  
"I live my life," said Jim,  
"The same as any other man.  
I serve as best I can.  
Somebody must fix parasols, and why not I?  
Why not indulge my whim?  
I love the changing clouds against the sky;  
I love the landscape that the asters beautify;  
I love the song of streamlet flowing near;  
The rhythm and the rhyme of sonneteer;  
I love the poets in the open all the year."  
He ceased to speak and opened up his old tool kit.  
I looked at him and then I looked in it,  
And saw a grimy volume once my favorite.

Next day while I was playing golf and Jim  
Was sitting where he always loved to sit,



Beside a stream, beneath an old elm tree,  
I placed my golf ball on the tee  
And drove,—  
I drove it with terrific vim.  
And then I watched the fleck of white till it grew dim.  
Gaston exclaimed, "By Jove,  
That drive was certainly a dream,"  
Just as the ball dropped in the stream  
Not more than ten feet distant from Umbrella Jim.  
I hardly heard what my companion said.  
Quite undisturbed the poet munched his crust of bread,  
And while he munched he read,  
Read many times a poem that I used to love,  
Before I ever heard of golf or tees.  
It was the ballad of the Master and the Trees.  
That night I pondered long about Umbrella Jim,  
And now I always tip my hat to him.

## *A Hill Woman's Soliloquy*

AS SHE RIDES TO A COUNTRY STORE

I ONLY have two dozen eggs  
And a little mite of sang;  
There is a pain in both of my legs;  
But the air is sweet, and a pleasant tang  
Of spring is on the breeze.  
That jaybird's like a young mustang!  
Those tomtits in the trees! . . .  
I know my lot is hard,  
But a brown thrush lives in our back yard  
And all day long he sings. . . .  
This nag is getting old and slow,  
But still we needed things,—  
Coffee and gingham and calico,  
And there was no one else to go.  
The store is not so far away—  
Only about four miles—  
And this is such a pretty day.—  
Well look at that big fern! . . .  
And little Bess will be at the stiles  
Waiting when I return.  
Bessie was seven back in the fall,  
And I am thirty-five—  
The mother of twins, eight in all,  
And only one alive.  
But I will not bewail my fate,  
For little Bess will soon be eight  
And a wonderful mind for a child's. . . .  
  
Now I declare! A circus in town,  
April the tenth. That funny old clown! . . .

I went to a circus once when a girl;  
Tigers and animals just like these,—  
Men performing the flying trapeze,  
A big clown with a tambourine,  
And one who drank from an old canteen.  
I saw a tumbler twist and twirl,  
And a woman in tights the color of pearl,  
And some in velveteen. . . .  
No, no, no, I do not cry;  
But glitter and sheen  
Of spangles—I mean  
That something's in my eye.



## *Zeke Stinnitt*

**Z**EKE STINNITT's dwelling burned last night  
And left them in a sorry plight.  
Of course he did not own the shack;  
Moved in one time when work was slack,  
And Simpson never charged him rent.  
So Zeke lived happy and content.  
His little towheads, it is said,  
Slept sometimes in a hungry bed;  
But every night Zeke played the fiddle  
And had them guessing some new riddle.  
Now everything they had is gone  
Except their clothes—they had them on.  
A table, and some stools, a chair,  
Four gourds and all their kitchen ware;  
Two china cups, a coffee pot,  
An album and a small whatnot;  
A picture of the President,  
A photograph of Zeke,—all went;  
A checker board, a large coon skin,  
A mink hide and the violin.  
Zeke took the blow right on the chin,  
And never batted either eye,  
As every one will testify,  
Till suddenly it flashed on him  
(A hideous deathhead, stark and grim)  
His fiddle, and it had new strings,  
Had burned with all the other things.  
Then Zeke collapsed; a piercing pain  
Shot through his heart into the brain.  
Some fear poor Zeke may go insane.

## *Jeffrey Tom*

IT had not rained for ninety days  
And still a cloudless sky;  
Water, water, water soon,  
Or everything must die.

The people gathered in the church,  
Religious and profane,  
To make confession of their sins  
And supplicate for rain.

When Jeffrey Tom was called upon  
He told the reason why  
He could not have his washing done  
Since all the creeks were dry.

“O Lord,” he cried out fervently,  
“I know Thou hatest dirt.  
This is the sixth or seventh time  
I’ve wore this Sunday shirt.”

While yet these words were on his lips  
There came a flash of light;  
God looked at Jeffrey’s Sunday shirt  
And sent the rain all night.

## *John R. Kirk*

EVER see old John R. Kirk?  
Never did a lick of work,  
Heard it said, in all his life.  
What? He has a working wife.  
Smartest man I ever saw.  
Knows more politics and law  
Than a U. S. Senator.  
More about the Great World War,  
Both abroad and here at home,—  
League of Nations, Teapot Dome;  
Just what Henry Ford will do,  
Maybe in a year or two.  
Can't quite understand his knowledge.  
Says he never went to college.  
Read, he says, from in his teens,  
Dailies and the magazines.  
But he knows the ancient stuff;  
Quotes Macbeth: "Lay on Macduff."  
Often speaks of Cataline's  
Bold nefarious designs;  
Talks of Alcibiades—  
All the old conspiracies.  
Draws his morals, clarifies  
Things before your very eyes.  
Beats the devil what he knows,—  
History, poetry and prose;  
Old love stories such as these:  
Abelard and Eloise;  
Francesca da Rimini.  
Explains the psychology  
Of such awful tragedies.



If he never went to college,  
Don't see where he got his knowledge.

But his field is politics.  
This is where he knows the tricks.  
Understands exactly why  
Some are wet and others dry;  
Knows precisely who will win  
When the full returns are in.  
Sits up all night long, they say,  
Burns the midnight oil till day,  
Reading, thinking, analyzing,  
Balancing the eulogizing  
With the latest scandalizing.  
Like a sibyl in a trance  
Sees the full significance  
Of the issues; seems to know  
Just what every wind will blow.  
Long before October's gone  
Feels the groundswell coming on.  
People come from far and nigh  
Just to hear him prophesy.  
Sits there whittling on a box,  
Fellows gathering round in flocks  
Till they almost block the walk  
Listening to old John R. talk.  
Whiskers yellow as a coon  
Long about the last of June,  
Amber-streaked; expectorates  
Freely while he ruminates.  
Helps to weigh the evidence  
And foresee the consequence.  
Hasn't missed his prophecy

Since way back in ninety-three.  
Derndest man this side of Styx  
In the field of politics.  
Pity President doesn't get  
John R. in his cabinet.

## *Pegleg Jack*

PEGLEG JACK

(They called him Peg  
Because he had a wooden leg,—  
Knee-joint operation sometime back  
Before the Civil War,—  
Nobody ever knew what for;  
Some said erysipelas,  
Others water on the joint.  
But this is nothing to the point  
Of what I started out to say,  
Which was)—

Pegleg Jack

For two score years and ten  
Sat in his little dingy room,  
On his old shoe bench pegging away,  
Making, mending and half-soling shoes,  
Listening to the gossip and the news,  
And taking now and then  
A sharp Socratic whack  
At old man Gloom,  
Or some young upstart, egotist or fool,  
Loafer, rounder, hypocrite or crook.

Old Pegleg never went to school,  
Except a month or two,  
Early in his youth,  
So far as anybody ever knew,  
And yet I'm sure,  
Though lowly and obscure,  
He had as fine a grasp of truth



As any man who ever wrote a book.  
For miles and miles around  
He was regarded as a sage;  
And many a pilgrimage  
To his little shop was made  
In search of counsel, deemed  
By almost every one as sound,  
Though far too often disobeyed,  
Or soon forgot;  
For many, like the brilliant Alcibiades,  
Who loved, but heeded not  
The teachings of his master; Socrates  
(Or so it seemed),  
Plunged headlong down the primrose path,  
Unmindful of the aftermath.

Like Aristotle, Pegleg thought  
That happiness is the proper aim of life;  
But quite unlike the Stagirite,  
This wise, though poor and humble wight,  
Believed and taught  
That blessedness  
Is not attained by leisure,  
Given over to pursuits of pleasure;  
But rather through some useful work  
A man so loves he doesn't want to shirk,  
Though fraught  
With weary toil, and even sometimes strife.  
And it is very plain to see  
Shoemaker Jack lived his philosophy  
And held the golden key  
To happiness;  
For there he sat, day in, day out,

Apparently without  
The consciousness  
Of any drudgery,  
Singing at his work,  
That never seemed to irk,  
But kept him fresh and sweet and glad.  
I never knew old Pegleg sad.  
I've seen him build a pair of shoes  
With face aglow, as if he glimpsed rich views  
Of Paradise with every stroke.

Like all great teachers this man spoke  
In parables of hill and stream and wood,  
Discovering spiritual laws  
In Nature, threading out the cause  
Of evil and of good.

I've seen him work and heard him sing,  
But never knew him to complain  
Of anything;  
And if he ever had a pain  
Of any kind,  
Either of the body or the mind,  
Nobody ever found it out.  
And I do really doubt  
If he had had the gout,  
In heel or toe  
(He only had one foot, you know),  
He ever would have noticed it himself,  
So wrapped up was he in his work on shoes.  
Don't get the notion that he wrought for pelf,  
For it is said that many a time  
He wouldn't even charge a dime.



He used to say  
He couldn't use the money anyway,  
And really didn't need a cent  
Except to pay his rent  
And buy a little victuals now and then.

This oracle of wisdom and counselor of men  
Admitted that he found it hard to learn to count,  
But said that long before he reached the age of ten  
He knew the Sermon on the Mount,  
And many psalms that David wrote;  
And in his boyhood used to quote  
The thirteenth chapter of Corinthians,  
To silence narrow-minded theologians;  
And though he never joined the church  
He loved to search  
The Scriptures for the truth  
Even in his youth.

I wonder, now, can this explain, forsooth,  
The miracle of Pegleg Jack,  
Content and happy in his little shack,  
Creating and rebuilding shoes,  
Listening to the gossip and the news,  
And taking now and then a sharp Socratic whack  
At old man Gloom,  
Who did not dare invade his room,  
Himself consorting with the Muse  
Of toil, who taught him that a wooden peg  
Can be as useful as a real leg.



## *Tine Meek*

TINE MEEK was born on Bullskin Creek,  
But genius such as old man Tine's  
Can not be circumscribed by lines  
Of geographic boundary,  
Or explained by heredity.  
Old Tiny was the biggest freak  
That ever looked on Bullskin Creek,  
And if you traced his stream of blood  
Clean back to father Noah's flood,  
You could not find another Tine  
In all that long ancestral line.  
His forbears were just commonplace,  
But old Tine was a real ace.

This man Tine Meek of whom I speak—  
An epic genius as unique  
As Chaucer, Dante or Defoe,—  
Resembled Michael Angelo  
In detailed grasp of every part,  
And scope and grandeur of his art.  
He could not use the painter's brush,  
Or carve his dream in stone,  
But he could make the angels blush  
Around the great White Throne;  
For he was master of an art  
To which there is no counterpart  
In chisel, brush or poet's rhymes,  
In Renaissance or modern times.

Tine Meek was old, but from his youth,  
No man had heard him tell the truth.

There was no malice in his heart;  
He lied because he loved the art.  
He did not mean to be profane,  
And Tiny never lied for gain.  
He had a comprehensive mind;  
The truth is cabined, cribbed, confined;  
Is just a part and not the whole,  
And Tine was big and broad of soul.  
He never falsified for fame,  
And Tiny Meek was not to blame.  
He simply did not have the heart  
To sin against his sacred art.  
He was predestined to the game:  
His body did not tell the truth;  
He weighed three hundred pounds, forsooth,  
Yet Tiny was his name.

If Homer was a worthy Greek,  
Then why condemn old Tiny Meek?  
Did Shakespeare write his name in wax  
Because he did not stick to facts?  
“There’s no more kick in just plain truth  
Than in an artificial tooth;  
And mankind could not live a week  
On arid facts,” said Tiny Meek.

His lies had all the tang of wine;  
Though not the truth, they were divine.  
When Peter, standing by the gate,  
Heard old Tine Meek prevaricate,  
He swung the pearly portals wide,  
And said, “You win, please step inside.”



## *Tom Hicks*

TOM HICKS had laid his seventh wife  
Beneath the churchyard sod,  
And feeling somewhat lonesomelike,  
He had old Lightfoot shod,  
And donned his longtail Sunday coat  
And started down the road  
That led beyond the shallow ford  
Where Sallie Jones abode.  
I don't know why, but Sallie seemed  
Not in the least surprised,  
When Tom rode up before her stiles;  
It may be she surmised  
Last Sunday at the funeral,  
When she condoled his loss  
And saw him pale and trembly-like  
That Tom might ride across,  
And thank his friends on Poplar Flat  
That took on at the grave,  
And showed their sympathy the way  
That decent folks behave.  
At any rate there Sallie sat  
And looked out toward the ford,  
And rocked and hummed an old love tune,  
And meekly thanked the Lord  
For all his many blessings  
To a maiden sixty-six  
For Sallie still had three front teeth,  
And faith in Thomas Hicks.  
And Tom had faith in Sallie, too,  
For he had seen her smiles



Grow sweeter with each pilgrimage  
As he had passed her stiles  
In search of one and seven wives,  
And still she was the same  
True, patient, sympathetic friend.  
Thought Tom, "Now it would be a shame  
To pass the spinster by again,  
And though I'm some perplexed,  
All things considered now I think  
I'll make Miss Sallie next."  
And so Tom Hicks drew rein before  
The home of Sallie Jones,  
And hitched old Lightfoot to the fence—  
A pack of skin and bones,—  
But Sallie played quite innocent,  
And rocked and rocked and rocked,  
As Tom stood boldly at the door  
And knocked and knocked and knocked,  
Till finally, "Come in," she said,  
"Why oh, it's Mr. Hicks;  
You frightened me, so sudden-like."  
"Oh, Sallie, same old tricks!  
Well, seriously, Miss Sallie Jones,  
It's growing rather late,  
And Parson Graves lives down the road,  
And Lightfoot's at the gate.  
I'm sixty-eight, if I'm a day,  
And you are sixty-six,  
But I've decided, Sallie Jones,  
To make you Sallie Hicks."  
"Be seated, won't you, Mr. Hicks,"  
Said Sallie, coy and shy,  
"I think that there were seven times

When you did pass me by;  
But still I never lost my faith,  
I trusted soon or late,  
You'd ride old Lightfoot down the road  
And hitch him to my gate.  
I'll not deceive you, Mr. Hicks,  
I knew you when a boy,  
And won't pretend now to conceal  
My happiness and joy.  
I'm all aflutter, I'll admit,  
For just an hour ago,  
I stood before old Parson Graves  
And married Richard Roe."

## *Ragged Eddy*

JUST the fact that Ragged Eddy  
Wouldn't take a job  
That's steady,  
May be more or less elusive.  
Certainly it's not conclusive  
That he hated work.  
He would never shirk  
An obligation once he gave his word.  
Always said he couldn't rob  
Himself of natural pleasures;  
This would be absurd,  
Though it's where the world has erred.  
Follow Nature, seek her treasures,  
Said the great Rousseau.  
His disciple, Ragged Eddy,  
Held it duty to be ready  
To obey her call,  
Whatsoever fate befall,  
Or whatever winds may blow.  
Any day the fickle weather  
May be right for fish or feather,  
Who can ever know?  
Then suppose you have a tether?  
Thus I've heard him reason often  
Till my heart would sometimes soften,  
Getting Eddy's point of view.  
But it's really nothing new.  
Socrates conceived his duty  
Was pursuit of truth and beauty.



I recall his clothes were shreddy,  
Just like those of Ragged Eddy.

Genius never has been understood.  
Burns nor Shelley; Byron, Poe,  
Lincoln, Whistler; who could know  
Such a fellow as Thoreau?  
And I pray you to remember  
Eddy was the bleak December  
Of this mystic brotherhood.

Worked a little through the winter;  
Could have been a first-class printer.  
But from March till late November,  
Ragged Eddy and his dog  
Knew no business tie or shackle;  
Can of worms and fishing tackle  
All that either asked of heaven.  
Sitting humped up like a frog  
On his old elm fishing log,  
Half asleep and maybe dreaming;  
Sunlight on the water gleaming,  
Eddy fished from nine till seven.  
Hungry Towser, loving, trusting,  
Beamed upon his master, lusting  
For the coming fry.  
Not a trace in his expression  
Of impatience; sweet confession  
Of affection only in his eye.

Maybe dear old Ragged Eddy  
Was erratic and unsteady.  
I have heard men call him crazy;

But they always found him ready  
With this one reply:  
"Follow Nature, not Ambition,  
If you wish the full fruition  
Of a happy life.  
Fortune's smile is just flirtation,  
Fraught with struggle and vexation,  
Vanity and strife."

Thus it's clear, it seems to me,  
That Rousseau's philosophy  
Shaped the life of poor old Eddy.  
Still I think, as has been said he  
Was, at times, a little hazy;  
Or I wonder could it be  
He was only lazy?

## *Sam Simp*

I saw Sam Simp come shuffling down  
The dusty lane in mid-July.  
The sun was like an evil eye  
That blasted blades of bluegrass brown.  
The million yellow butterflies  
That swarmed the old white road  
Were palpitating in the shade.  
The lark left off her summer ode.  
Snake feeders folded gauzy wings,  
And clung to leaf and blade.  
The bees had ceased to botanize,  
And lolled about the springs.

But Sam Simp never felt the heat.  
His mind was on the brilliant feat  
Of kicking with an expert toe  
(A joy that few can ever know)  
An old tin can and keeping it  
Within the narrow road.  
It tested both his skill and wit,  
But on he strode  
And booted it a mile or more,  
Trying to lower his last year's score.  
He never touched it with his hand,  
And only once I saw it land  
Outside of bounds and in a ditch.  
And then he never dropped a stitch,  
But lifted it with master kick  
As slick as with a shinny stick.  
My golfing friend who watched poor Sam,  
Ejaculated: "I'll be damn!  
That chap is just a tarnal fool."  
I wondered, measured by whose rule?



## *Jerry*

JERRY never had a full new suit  
All the years I knew him.  
Even when a little lad,  
Never was completely clad;  
But this much, I think, is due him:  
There is simply no dispute  
That the kid was mighty cute  
In his new shoes, spic and span,  
One sock black, the other tan,  
Wearing ragged britches.  
Sometimes Jerry's pants were new;  
Any old hat then would do;  
Made no difference to him  
If it didn't have a brim.  
One thing new was all the riches  
Jerry ever coveted in clothes.  
Strangest notion, I suppose,  
Even any juvenile  
Ever had of style.

Lived his life as he began—  
Boy was father to the man.  
Jerry reached the age of thirty  
Wearing collars limp and dirty,  
When his shirts were fresh and clean.  
If his face were washed and shaven,  
Then his ears became the haven  
Dirt went into quarantine.  
I have seen his fancy hose  
Peeping through at worn out toes;

Trousers new and latest style,  
Waistcoat out of date and vile.  
Jerry tried to dress in fashion.  
It was his consuming passion—  
Spent his income on his clothes.  
Seemed a tragedy sublime  
Couldn't get two things to chime  
Any time during his poor fated life,  
Even when he took a wife.  
If you wish an explanation,  
This is my interpretation:  
Jerry lacked the sense of rhyme.



## *Phil Jim*

HE never did a lick of work for hire or money pay,  
But Phil Jim wasn't lazy, for I've heard his neighbors say  
He'd walk ten miles or more to help a farmer kill his hogs,  
But all he'd ever take would be some chitlings for his dogs;  
Or maybe now and then a mess of backbones or spareribs;  
And every fall he gathered corn and helped to fill the cribs  
All through the river bottom and way over on Big Fern,  
And might be gone a week or more before he would return,  
But always brought back home a ham or side of middling  
meat,

Or sometimes hominy and souse, or maybe pickled feet,  
For Phil was mighty thoughtful and a good hand to provide,  
And Sarah met him at the door as smiling as a bride.  
At night he went ahunting and always caught a coon  
Or possum in persimmon time, especially if the moon  
Was shining favorable, or if the zodiac was right,  
For he knew signs for catching game and when the fish  
would bite.

Phil lived an awful easy life, for he and Sarah had  
A half a dozen females and one little hunchback lad,  
And Nance and Kate and Sallie Ann, and even little Joe,  
Picked berries in the summer and caught rabbits in the snow.  
Then Phil would work with thrasher hands right through  
the burning heat

And maybe get a shoulder or sometimes a bag of wheat,  
For he was sure a master hand—the best they all agreed  
That ever stacked a blade of straw, or sacked a grain of seed.  
And somehow Phil was lucky for when fishing wasn't good,  
He helped Sam Johnson kill his hogs and got a load of wood;  
Or if it were too wet to plow, he caught a mess of cats,



Or earned some meal at Simpson's mill for killing pesky rats.  
Once he had hunted all night long and came back home  
without

The striking of a single trail, completely down and out.  
But when he reached his garden gate, a ray of glorious light  
Was shot athwart the leaden sky, dispelling gloom and night.  
For Sallie Ann came running out just tickled fit to kill,  
"Oh Dad, we've got a baby and his name is little Phil."

## *O'Shea*

O'SHEA could tell a good foxhound  
Of any age or size,  
And even newborn puppies by  
The marks around their eyes.  
He always knew which ones to keep,  
And which ones should be drowned;  
And he was held authority  
In all the country round.

Now Hanrahan, his neighbor, had  
Three children born one day,  
And in his jubilation Pat  
Sent for his friend, O'Shea.  
"Oh, Mike, come over here today,  
And bring your wife, Colleen;  
I've got the finest litter that  
Your eye has ever seen."

An hour later Mike and Pat  
Stood by the trundle bed  
And viewed the sleeping triplets till  
O'Shea spoke up and said:  
"Oh, Hanrahan, please lift that shade—  
Let in a bit of sun.  
There—Pat, I think if I were you,  
I'd keep the middle one."



## *Jeff Tom Witt*

JEFF TOM WITT and his wife, Sooky June,  
Sat in their dog run one afternoon,  
Jeff leaning back in his split-bottomed chair,  
Facing Sooky June who was combing out her hair.  
Early in the summer and that same day  
Traffic first started on the new highway.  
Such sights these parts never had seen:  
Chevrolet, Buick, Ford, Lincoln limousine;  
Every type of auto car, trailer, motor bus,  
Streaming over concrete, kicking up a fuss.  
Sooky June sat there gazing at the cars;  
Old Tige coon dog barking through the bars.  
Jeff Tom humped up looking like a toad,  
Chewing black tobacco with his back to the road.  
Sooky tried to tell Jeff what was going on;  
He just stared at her, "I'll be doggone!"  
Something like a funeral train came sweeping by.  
Sooky took her specs off, "My, my, my!  
Who would have thought it now, hauling of the dead  
Forty miles an hour in a thing painted red?  
Looked like a lion cage,—maybe 'twas a truck."  
Jeff Tom blurted out, "Jist my luck,  
Payrades, funerals, circuses, yet  
I can't see a thing whar I set."



## *Josh Jenkins*

**J**OSH JENKINS rode down from Pine Mountain farm  
On a sway-backed and shaved-tail bay;  
His shiny Prince Albert was out at the arm,  
But his love had known no decay,  
Though his mustache still waxed had lost the old charm  
Of an erstwhile Valentine Day.

Jemimy Lushington slept in the vale  
Deep under cedar and pine;  
What matter the wind was a biting gale,  
And the snow blew pellets of brine?  
The sting of the ice like the scorpion's tail  
Was only a heart anodyne.

Jemimy had written in a year long ago  
To Joshua only a line:  
"Come down, though the valley be shrouded in snow,  
On the fourteenth. Your Valentine—"  
But here the pen failed for death stopped the flow  
Before Jemimy could sign.

Josh Jenkins was then a handsome young man,  
His horse a blooded young bay;  
But the merciless years have covered a span—  
A hundred or more, some say,  
Since this brave knight of the heart began  
To keep his Valentine Day.

But whether in rain or sunshine or snow,  
And whether in age or in youth,  
He has kept his tryst in the valley below,  
By a lonely grave in ruth;  
And nobody still can say or know  
That he keeps it alone, forsooth.

## *Mart Combs*

MART COMBS was just a failure;  
I have often heard it said  
He had a right good start in life,  
But could not get ahead  
One cent beyond the little farm  
That came to him by will:  
Instead of climbing up the slope,  
He seemed to go down hill.  
His fences were all toppled down  
And covered here and there  
With clumps of poison oak and briars,  
Almost beyond repair.  
The house itself had not seen paint  
Since Martin married Sue  
And took her there a happy bride  
Way back in sixty-two.  
The ell he built in eighty-three  
When Jilson married Kate  
He had not finished covering  
In eighteen ninety-eight.  
The house and yard and stable lot  
Were filled with junk and trash  
He bought around at sales because  
Some neighbor needed cash.  
Farm implements of every kind  
Lay rotting in the field,  
And crop had followed crop until  
He couldn't get a yield.  
When corn was scarce and wheat had failed  
This man would rob himself



That he might leave a peck of meal  
On some bare pantry shelf.  
The poor old tramp that passed his door  
He fed and kept all night  
Then slipped a coin into his hand  
To help him win the fight.  
One winter when the snow was deep  
And all the creeks were froze  
Old Martin, like a Saint Bernard,  
Went out in search of those  
Who might be poor and needing help,  
And found a negro crone  
Half starved and freezing in her hut,  
Rheumatic and alone.  
Now Martin knew this old black hag  
Had often stole his wheat,  
And apples and potatoes and  
Sometimes a side of meat;  
And even filched whole sacks of corn  
He needed for his hogs;  
But Martin went and got his team  
And hauled a load of logs  
And built a fire and fed her till  
The woman seemed right smart.  
No, no, not heaping coals of fire;  
But just a great big heart.



## *David Bruner*

HE rode a sheepskin saddle Sundays into every cove,  
And preached Jehovah, but on weekdays wrought  
in deeds of love.

He knew the law and prophets, Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah,  
The Book of Lamentations, and especially Jeremiah.  
And yet 'twas said he could not read, but this seems  
too absurd—

I've heard him quote a thousand lines and never miss a word.  
His beard was long and flowing and his hair a drift of snow;  
He wore a bright red flannel shirt,—but this was long ago.  
He pictured Hell like Dante, the lowest circles filled  
With rich and pleasure-loving whom the lust of sin  
had killed.

He saw the whirlwind in the cloud, the great Millennium,  
And pled with wicked sons of men to flee the wrath to come.  
As fearless as Elijah on Mt. Carmel's heathen height,  
He scorned the priests of Baal and invoked the God of Might.  
This fiery preacher would exhort and agonize in prayer  
Till sweat would stand upon his face and soak his snowy hair.  
He warned his congregations all to walk the narrow path:  
“Ye stiff-neck generations, ah, He'll pour out vials of wrath.”  
And yet this man was human and in sickness and distress  
Forgave the vilest sinner while he pled with Christ to bless.  
He poured out dire damnation when his pulpit loins were girt;  
All other times there beat a heart beneath that flaming shirt.

## *The Hudson Seal*

WELL, Ma has got her new fur coat and feels as fine as silk;  
I had to sell old Rose and Pied, though we all  
loved their milk.

But gee! Ma does look stunning, and she had her heart so set,  
I don't begrudge one cent it cost, if I am big in debt.  
Last night Jemimy cried and cried; today the Doctor claimed  
The child was only hungry—somehow I felt ashamed.  
I like good cream in coffee, but I'm glad to drink it black;  
Still if my baby needs the milk, I wish old Pied was back.  
But Ma does seem so happy. Why can't I milk the goat?  
She thinks her neighbors envy her in this new seal fur coat.

But did they envy Mrs. Smith? Well may I just repeat  
Some things I overheard today as she passed down the street:  
"Now there goes something, I declare, I can't quite under-  
stand.

Her husband works for wages, and is just a common hand."  
"There's something more than wages on this Mrs. John Smith's  
back."

"I'd be ashamed to wear that coat and live in their old shack."

"That sealskin cost five hundred if it cost a single cent."

"I'll wager forty dollars that John Smith can't pay his rent."

"I know that woman has not had in two weeks one square  
meal,"

As Mrs. Smith swept down the street in her new Hudson Seal.



## *Tam O'Nan*

TAM O'NAN enjoyed life,—  
Was never known to fret or worry;  
And neither could his little wife  
Be thrown into a flurry:  
They faced life's facts with poise sublime,  
With no regard for flight of time.

They had some little democrats,  
But being on the dole,  
And living near a fishing hole  
That teemed with perch and cats,—  
With not a poor relation  
On any kind of ration,  
And food so sure they felt secure  
And didn't mind inflation.

Sometimes they'd fish for half a day  
And never get a bite;  
Then Tam would turn to Maud and say,  
"I'll not give up the fight;  
But as it's getting rather late  
Let's go home now and dig fresh bait,  
And I'll come back tonight."  
And better luck no man could wish,  
For when the wind was right,  
Exactly as the clock struck nine  
He'd always pull in hook and line,  
And muttering to himself, "pish, pish,"  
He'd go home with a string of fish.  
I know Tam didn't like to work,



And I confess that very quirk,  
But let's not call him lazy.  
He'd walk five miles to catch a coon  
That wasn't worth a picayune,  
And though this seems unsound,  
I never thought him crazy,  
Since I have chased a golf ball round  
A hundred acre field,  
And never shot, as I'm alive,  
A score under ninety-five,  
Or made a hole in one.  
A dog fight with a savage coon  
Beneath a full-grown harvest moon,  
May bring as big a yield  
In downright sport and solid fun  
As golfing all day in the sun.

Maud didn't go in much for style,  
And O'Nan did not need a pile  
Of ready cash—about enough  
To keep the little wife in snuff  
And always have himself a twist  
Of old Kentucky Burley.  
And so it seems they never missed  
The luxuries that some folks doubt  
That they could even live without;  
But they had many other things:  
The solos that the wood thrush sings,  
And daffodils young April brings;  
The miracle of insect wings;  
And when they got up early,  
And saw the sunrise jubilee  
That touched the hills with fire



And put a song in every tree—  
God's own cathedral choir—  
They worshipped Him who thus released  
For them this great religious feast,  
For which they never paid the priest  
In any kind of money.  
They saw Jack Frost in autumn dye  
The sumacs and the sweet gums red;  
The cardinal went flashing by  
With topknot on his head;  
They ate pawpaws right off the trees,  
And found the place where summer bees  
Had stored their golden honey.  
The children raced the tumbleweed  
And watched the little birdies feed  
On yellow-rayed sunflower seed;  
They tied threads round the junebugs' thighs,  
And chased the painted butterflies  
That swarmed the sunny mead.

Maud, always solemnlike and calm,  
Would often sing a Bible psalm  
That made the children happy;  
They dearly loved their little mom,  
And always minded pappy.  
A good-sized mink hide now and then  
Would bring in Tam a five or ten,  
And set him free to have a spree—  
A little harmless jag  
That only loosed his tongue to wag  
And sometimes boast a bit and brag.  
And what more could a fellow ask  
Than just a smallish honest flask

Of sparkling moonshine and a dram  
On law-abiding Uncle Sam,  
Now warring for democracy  
To make the world as blithe and free  
As Tam O'Nan when on a spree?



## *Nance*

THE cross-eyed twins were fighting for a piece of  
punkin bread,  
And one upset the sorghum jar on Nance's table spread.

"Cy Perkins, you had better call a halt on fightin' talk."  
I glanced at Nance's falcon nose and saw a flaming hawk

Swoop down upon the trembling brood. "I've turned that  
tablecloth  
Already twice for company." She snatched a cup of broth

And hurled it at Cy's grizzled head: "There, cut another  
notch  
On your gun barrel and call it 'Nance.' You've made an awful  
botch

"Of life. Five sons lie yan, and yet you show your wicked gun  
To strangers, boastin' that it holds two notches for each one.

"Them boys wuz mine!" Cy stood aghast, but poor old Nance  
flamed on:

"What matter if you murdered ten; my baby boys is gone!"

Volcanic rage out of a heart, silent through years of pain;  
Dumb, uncomplaining drudge, now frenzied and insane.

"Gone! gone! my babies gone!" she shrieked, and sprawled  
upon the floor.

An awful gust of howling wind, and Death stalked through  
the door.

## *Sidney Sampson*

SIDNEY SAMPSON loved the anvil,  
When a little boy in Danville,  
Loved the slack tub, forge and bellows;  
And his playmates, poet fellows,  
Claimed they'd seen the fairies dance  
And whirl and twirl and skip and hop  
And run around and flip and flop  
In his father's blacksmith shop.  
But this, I think, was just romance.

It may be there is little merit  
In the theory we inherit  
Tastes and skills and tendencies.  
Well, then, call it what you please,  
But Sid's father hammered iron  
And the shop was his environ  
Luring like Ulysses' siren,  
Bringing him unbounded joy.  
And it somehow came to pass  
That young Sidney did outclass  
His father in his cleverness and skill  
Of hammer, file and drill;  
In shoeing horses, welding steel,  
And fitting tire to wagon wheel.  
And he was wizard with a tool—  
Had a skill not learned in school.  
But it's not as artisan  
I am thinking of this man,—  
Rather as philosopher.  
He was born, I think, to rule



By his wit both sage and fool.  
Seemed to love the common cur  
Quite as much as blooded hound.  
While he worked at some machine,  
Men would often gather round,  
Talking as he fitted parts,—  
Prattling of the foreign marts,  
Tariff, banking, sometimes arts,  
With a confidence profound.  
Sid would listen quite serene,  
Spill a bit of nicotine,  
Speak a figure now and then,  
“Move your backbands back, my men;  
You are plowing much too deep.”  
Never seemed to moralize;  
Often wouldn't move his eyes  
From his work to satirize,  
With a biting epigram.  
Seemed half listening, half asleep,  
Yet he caught the talk that's cheap,  
And would loose a battering ram  
Of metaphors to smash some sham,  
While he drew a diagram.  
Understood the storms and calms,  
Read the proverbs and the psalms,  
Knew Josh Billings and Mark Twain,  
Took his figures from the rain,  
The wind, the soil, the sea,  
Sometimes from a flower or tree,  
Sometimes from the horse or dog.  
Nothing ever seemed in fog.  
Kept his eye on field and crop;  
Often let a symbol drop



Fable of the farm or shop.  
Every fact suggested cause;  
Nature wrote his code of laws.

Plato's school was in a grove;  
Zeno's on a porch;  
Old Sid's smithy where he strove,  
Held aloft the torch,—  
A blacksmith's shop where treasure-trove  
Could be picked up any day  
In almost anything he'd say.  
Maybe told in allegory  
Or some simple, homey story,  
Parable or simile;  
Sometimes in sharp repartee—  
Language that did not offend,—  
But helped the dull to comprehend—  
Smote the deaf ear to attend,  
And forced the blind to see.  
Though his face was sometimes seen  
Covered with a sooty sheen,  
Sidney Sampson's tongue was clean  
And his penetration keen.

## *Golden Fleece*

PLAYED horseshoes at the crossroads shop  
And hunted every night;  
Just let the ragweeds take his crop  
And living out of sight.

The market means the same to him  
When brogans sell at five,  
And beefsteak's on the new moon's rim,  
But honey in the hive.

Ginseng now hangs in golden rows  
From joist and puncheon floor,  
And hides of twenty kinds repose  
On barn and cabin door.

A coonskin brings ten good thrift stamps,  
A mink a victory bond;  
Molasses in the sugar camps,  
And bullfrogs in the pond.

The ban is off on possum meat,  
And wild grapes everywhere;  
Let Wall Street buy five-dollar wheat,  
For what does Jason care?

## *Fiddling Mose*

FIDDLING MOSE had an ebon face  
And a head like a cotton boll;  
The white of his eye was a billiard ball;  
His lips were red as a Spanish shawl,  
And his teeth like the polar snow.

Nobody ever seemed to know  
The year or place  
Of fiddling Mose's birth;  
Though many a time I've wondered if  
Some prankish troll  
In evil tiff  
First welcomed him to earth;  
For fiddling Mose had a half-length arm  
And a little baby hand  
In which he held the fiddle bow.  
I used to wish that poor old Mose  
Had two good arms, and yet who knows  
His tiny hand and baby arm  
Did not explain his chieftest charm  
Of velvet tone and bowing skill,  
In rapid reel and old quadrille,  
And stately minuet.

"Muh half-length ahm and baby hand,"  
Said Fiddling Mose, "de good Lohd knows  
Has been muh big ahset.  
Disfiguments cahn't do no hahm  
Whar all befoh is planned.  
Ol' mahster gib me one shoht ahm



To fiddle at his command,  
And I has no regret.”

And well might fiddling Mose say that.  
Apollo never smote his lyre  
With music of diviner fire  
Than Mose’s bow begat.  
The deacon lost his pious scowl,  
The cynics all forgot to growl,  
And rheumatism passed away  
When Mose’s bow began its sway.  
He knew a polonaise in A,  
And loved the minuet in G;  
And I have heard that he could play  
A reel in any key.

At picnic, fair and marriage feast,  
Old fiddling Moses was high priest;  
In dance, in revelry and song,  
He was the center of the throng.  
His ivory eye and cotton-boll head  
Would roll and sway to the twinkling bow  
That danced and pranced  
Like a thing gone mad.  
His ebon face would all but glow,  
His lips grow crimson red,  
To hear the language of his Strad.  
And when he laid his ear down low  
As if to listen in  
To some strange mystic voice or word  
He always said an angel spoke,  
For this is what he heard:  
“Ol’ Moses you wahn’t bohn in sin;

Yoh natchal ailment's jist God's yoke  
To hol' you in  
And gib you fiddlin' discipline.  
A baby han' cahn't do no hahm.  
Den worship wid yoh violin  
And bress the Lohd foh yoh shoht ahm."

# *The Great American Home*

A DOMESTIC DIALOGUE

OH yes, he goes to Sunday school, but he just will refuse  
To comb his hair or brush his teeth, and never shines  
his shoes;

And will not wear a tie, and just won't clean  
his finger nails.

Fusses about his grades in school—no wonder that he fails.  
Now I just scrub and clean and work my very fingers off,  
But Dillard won't wear overshoes—just listen to him cough—  
And tracks my kitchen up with mud and throws his hat and  
coat—

That child is sick right now—I know he has a sore throat,  
But he won't let me swab it out—declares it feel all right—  
He'd say that if his leg was broke.”

“His leg was broke? that might  
Not give him sore throat.”

“Now there you go. That's just the way.  
I don't believe you care one bit for anything I say.  
All right, then. Let him rot with dirt, and never wash  
his face

Or ears again, so far as I'm concerned. It's your disgrace  
As much as mine. I've done my part. But you just sit and read  
And let that child drive me insane. What's that? He will?

Indeed

He'll not. That's what you always say, 'Just give him time.'

You can't

Tell me. A child that doesn't care will grow up ignorant;  
As like as not will land in jail, or be a vagabond,  
Provided that he isn't killed or drowned in that old pond.”



Four peaceful years like these pass by, and Dillard's  
seventeen.

"Oh, Kate, who's had my shaving set? I left that razor keen  
As ever touched a face, and now it's like a kitchen knife.  
It's strange that I can't have one thing or ever trust  
my wife

To watch that boy. He wears my ties, and hides my comb  
and brush,

And messes in my collar box and steals my di—"

"Oh hush!

Why don't you get your boy some clothes? He's just about  
a man.

You don't know how to raise a son—forget that Sallie Ann  
McCreary lives a block around the corner. Now Dillard knows  
That Sallie has her eye on him. My land! don't you  
suppose?—"

"Well Sallie Ann, or Sallie Kate, or Sallie High-Heel-Shoes,  
Just let him doll and dandy up, but Dillard shall not use  
My razor, not another time; nor you, to trim your corns,  
I don't care if they grow as long and hard as bossy's horns.  
Well where has that boy hid my hone? If he escapes the pen  
I'll miss my guess. Now here I am, and it is half past ten.  
Can't even find my shirt. I'll bet that I give him the birch."

"Oh yes, that's just your old excuse to stay away from  
church."

## *Canter John*

OLD CANTER JOHN

Once owned a farm,—  
Some said a big plantation,  
That is, speaking by comparison;  
But let me say by way of explanation,  
That farming wasn't Canter's charm.  
Not that he minded toil;  
But plowing wasn't in his line.  
He claimed he couldn't understand the soil,  
Or learn the law of crops.  
Besides, he didn't have the time.  
He sometimes raised a little hops  
Or garden truck, or fruit or thyme,  
And made a jug of beer or wine  
That neighbors said was fine;  
But old man Canter certainly  
Was not an agriculturist,  
Any more than dominoes is whist,  
Or bourbon ten years old is tea.

So Canter's soil washed onward to the sea,  
And long before his thirteenth child was born  
His farm had mostly passed away  
For costs and debts he could not pay;  
And what was left was just a cleft  
Between two ragged hills  
Denuded by corroding rills—  
In fact was just a big washout  
That wouldn't hardly more than sprout  
A decent blade of corn.



But men are not all talented the same,  
And Canter John was in the game.  
Fritz Kreisler cannot play a horn,  
Nor Schumann-Heinck the fiddle,  
And Woodrow, to the manner born,  
Could never solve the riddle  
Of world democracy,  
Except in theory,  
And yet he was a paragon.  
And so was Canter John;  
But Canter's field was law.  
He didn't know the statute from the code,  
And couldn't tell a pleading from an ode,  
And didn't give a straw.  
But what he banked on was the evidence.  
And let me say old Greenleaf didn't have a  
    thing on him.  
It absolutely made no difference  
To him about the facts;  
He shaped the proof to suit his whim,  
Regardless of all legislative acts.

Now Canter John was not a practicing attorney,  
But just a consecrated litigant—  
A chronic client militant,  
A bold crusader who would journey  
Into foreign parts in search of litigation,  
And buy up any kind of claim,  
Account or note, though barred by limitation,  
And warrant on it just the same.  
He used to say to me,  
"Thar ain't no knowin'  
When some technicalitee



May come your way;  
And then it keeps the courts agoin'."

I listened to the docket called one day,  
And out of sixty cases,  
I counted old man Canter's name  
In twenty-seven places.  
But this was in a lower court,  
And hardly showed the part he played,  
Or even gave a full report  
Of all he bagged in one crusade.

He never sued upon a claim  
Primarily to win;  
Such sordid and degraded aim  
He would have looked upon as sin.  
It was not consequence,  
But clash of evidence,  
The set of legal jaw;  
The sharp attack and skilled defence,  
The flow of master eloquence,  
That thrilled this old knight-errant of the law.  
Not long ago I asked about old Canter John.  
"Why don't you know," said Alex Hon,  
"His last sad acre's passed away,  
And he is sixty-nine today;  
But you can't find a single flaw  
In old man Canter's fame.  
With all his youthful fire and flame,  
He's still bootlegging law,  
And adding lustre to his name."

## *Thin Britches Dick*

THIN BRITCHES DICK  
Made loafing his profession.  
Claimed any kind of labor made him sick.  
The fact is loafing seemed a plumb obsession  
With Dick, and he was not responsible.  
Still men would criticise  
And say it was demonstrable  
A little exercise  
Had cured several cases almost as bad as his.  
But Dick was not convinced,  
As a fellow sometimes is,  
By argument, but never winced  
At criticism, and was patient like,  
And seemed to understand,  
And wouldn't strike  
Back, even with his tongue.

Now Dick was a different brand  
Of loafer from any ever seen  
Before: Apparently neither old nor young,  
Nor even in between.  
Aged men  
Said Dick  
Was loafing as far back as they could remember  
And seemed to stick  
Just as close to his job even then  
As any other member  
Of the whole community did to his.  
Now my interpretation is  
Wholly different from his critics',

And I believe that analytics  
Would reveal that Dick was not obsessed  
At all;  
But that he knew that he possessed  
Real genius for this one thing—  
In fact, had power in this to be a king.  
Probably heard the call  
Early in his youth,  
And understood the truth  
That loafing is a fine art  
Just as fiddling is, or poetry;  
And for my part  
I believe that he perfected it,  
Even as Beethoven mastered symphony,  
Partly for the reason that he had the grit,  
But mostly because  
He understood its laws  
And used his wit,  
And dedicated his life to it.

The last time I ever saw  
Thin Britches Dick  
I thought of Holmes' One-Hoss Shay.  
The lining of his trousers still was good,  
And probably about as thick  
As thin silk stockings are today.  
But by what law  
It stood  
The strain,  
When almost every stitch  
Of cloth that once had covered it  
Had long since disappeared  
Is something which



I can't explain.  
I used to wonder how the stuff was knit.  
And I remember that I feared  
That it might one day close the lease  
And in a flash  
Go all to smash  
As did the Deacon's Masterpiece.

But no such apprehensions troubled Dick.  
He knew his pants were getting slick,  
And maybe just a trifle thin;  
But he had tested every strand  
In warp and woof,  
And knew the brand,  
And had the proof  
That he could thoroughly depend  
On every thread from waistband to the shin.  
So Dick loafed on unto the end  
Without a sorrow or regret.  
For aught I know he's loafing yet.

## *Junebug Johnny*

THEY called him Junebug Johnny as he trudged the  
stone-gray street,  
Or trod the dusty highway with his worn and aching feet—  
They called him Junebug Johnny, but it seemed  
always the same  
Soft words were spoken tenderly—it was a sacred name.  
His hair was like the thistledown, his cheek  
its purple bloom,  
The step that once was swift and sure now tottered  
to its doom,  
And as he staggered down the road he reached continually  
For some bewitching phantasm that he alone could see.

The story is a sad one and beneath the summer skies  
I've heard it told by spartans with a mist before their eyes;  
Ulysses was an orator—the cadence of his tongue  
Was like Homeric music when the Grecian world was young.  
His argument was clean and sharp as old Damascus steel,  
The logic of a counselor, a fiery prophet's zeal.  
The portals of the golden road were swinging swift and wide,  
When queen-like young Penelope became his honored bride.

Then in the fulness of the years there came a little one,  
With Saxon curls upon his head that glinted in the sun,  
With cheeks as red as strawberries that ripen on the vine,  
And eyes that shimmered in the light  
like old Provencal wine.

His movements were as graceful as the swallow's  
wheeling flight,  
Untiring in his buoyant play from morning until night.

His shout was like the bluebird's note, his laugh  
a tang of joy,  
Ulysses and Telemachus, the father and the boy.

One day the child was running with a Junebug to a string,  
Enchanted by the beetle's hum and sheen upon its wing,  
And did not note the runaway that splashed through  
mire and mud—

A moment more the yellow curls were crimson in his blood.  
Two score of years have passed since then; an old man  
walks the street,  
Or trudges out the highway with his tired and aching feet,  
And tottering forward reaches for some fleeting unseen  
thing—

Elusive but alluring wraith—a junebug to a string.



## *Doctor Robb*

DEAR old sinner, Doctor Robb,  
Lived back there behind that knob.  
Never had a motor car,  
But he traveled wide and far  
Riding horseback many years,  
Doctoring the mountaineers.  
Rode in every kind of weather,  
Freezing cold and fiery hot;  
Seemed it didn't matter whether  
He was ever paid or not.  
He found happiness in serving  
Even those most undeserving.  
No call came he would not answer;  
Got up many a time at two  
Just to comfort poor old Sue  
Who was dying of a cancer.  
Kept a drugstore in his kit,  
Carried everything in it,  
Such as calomel and squills,  
Quinine powders, liver pills,  
Soothing syrup, paregoric,  
Now considered prehistoric.  
Furnished drugs to all his sick,—  
Moderns called him heretic.  
Babies he delivered free.  
Pay enough, he said, to see  
Joy fill the mother's eye  
When she hears her newborn cry.  
Mercury at ten below,  
One night he was called to go

To a woman in distress,  
Very poor and comfortless.  
Next day Doctor Robb was found  
Dead and frozen on the ground.  
Standing near his faithful mare  
Guarding him with loving care.



# *Nancy Hanks*

WRITTEN AT HER GRAVE

**M**ICHELANGELO dreamed of Creation,  
And he painted his dream  
On the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome.  
A million pilgrims a year  
Visit his Mausoleum  
In Santa Croce Church by the Arno.

Shakespeare's brain conceived,  
And Hamlet and Lear were born;  
And from every spot of the globe  
A pathway is worn to his tomb  
In Stratford on the Avon.

But here under the open sky,  
Far from the feverish tread of the vulgar crowds,  
Where only the voices of Nature are heard,  
I, an only pilgrim, stand at the humble grave  
Of the lowly Mother of Lincoln,  
In deep humility and reverence.  
In travail and pain she brought him forth;  
In poverty and toil, and with infinite patience  
Of Genius and Love,  
She molded his life,  
And gave to the world the Man—  
Supremest product of all creative art.



## *Lincoln*

THE Brief for world democracy is Lincoln.  
It was not accident of birth  
That made him great.  
Born within the palace of a king,  
He would have cast the royal purple off  
To clothe a shivering hind;  
Or hearing hunger's cry,  
Have plucked the jewels from an ancient crown  
To save the starving child.  
He was at home alike in palace-hut  
Of uncrowned peasant-kings  
And cabin-mansion of the presidents.  
For it was man he loved—  
The prince no less than pauper—  
The slave that treads the mill of toil  
As much as him who feeds upon the grist.  
And why make much of Lincoln's poverty?  
He was not poor but rich beyond all reckoning,  
Inheritor of human love,  
The heir of Him who taught the world  
The priceless wage of sacrifice—  
The gift of spending self  
In human benefactions.  
What matter that he went to school  
By pine knot or electric light?  
The page of knowledge that alone  
Could satisfy his soul  
Was taken from the book of human deeds,  
And Lincoln read between the lines  
What vulgar eyes could never see.

This giant of the backwoods  
Knew the art of splitting rails  
And riving knotty problems  
With the wedge of facts.  
He used no sophistry  
Nor ever led the simple mind astray  
In mystic paths beyond the beaten road.  
He understood the people's heart  
And found expression in the tongue of truth.  
He was a miracle to a doubting age—  
Despised by those he loved the most—  
As patient as the stars  
That from the birth of time  
Have looked on deeds of wrong  
And never lost their faith;  
As sturdy as the oak that lifts its strength  
Against the giant storm—  
Responsive as the aspen to the zephyr's breath.  
He heard the still sad music of humanity,  
But shook the burden from the soul  
In parables of fun—  
Exchanged the buskin for the sock  
To save his fellow man.



## *Irvin S. Cobb*

No voice that was ever heard  
In halls of entertainment  
Was listened to with more  
Exhilarating pleasure  
Than that of Irvin Cobb.  
He had a ponderous body,  
And his tread was heavy,  
But his footsteps wandered far  
And shook the earth with laughter.  
If he seemed awkward and uncomely,  
This was due in part to injuries received  
In lifting wounded soldiers  
Into boxcars during World War number One.  
His heart was tender and compassionate  
And he often laid aside reporter's pen  
To ease the sufferings of some shell-shocked hero.  
He suffered much himself  
And had dangerous operations,  
But he could look the surgeon in the eye  
And all but make him drop his scalpel  
With some witty jibe  
That sent the nurses from the room  
In bursts of smothered laughter.  
His fun was irrepressible.  
He could penetrate a tragedy  
With the eye of comedy  
And see the funny side of dire disaster.  
Irvin was a real democrat  
Who loved the man in overalls  
As much as him who holds the reins of government.



And especially was he fond  
Of that old-fashioned negro who fled from ghosts,  
But faced the gravest dangers  
With the courage of a lion.  
He loved him also for his loyalty  
And for his melody and mirth.

Cobb could take a story handed down from Adam  
And remint it in a brand new mould  
And make it legal tender.  
No man ever had a finer *feel* of words.  
His very language uttered humor  
In the dullest fable.  
He was master at a banquet,  
And his sidesplitting magic  
Saved many a postprandial hour  
From devastating dryness and monotony.  
He wrote a half a hundred books,  
Now read and loved  
Throughout the English-speaking world;  
And not a page of his is stained  
With coarse obscenity,  
And there is not a word  
That he could wish recalled.  
His books have lifted heavy burdens  
From human hearts, and lightened many an hour  
With scintillating wit.  
Judge Priest is Irvin Cobb himself  
In brain and heart—  
As unforgettable as any character  
Created by Charles Dickens  
Or William Makepeace Thackeray.  
And he who gives the world



A Pickwick or Micawber,  
A Becky Sharp or Old Judge Priest,  
Has made himself immortal.

Cobb's Exit from the world,  
Although still laughing,  
Left us for the moment  
With a tear in every eye,  
Till we recalled the burden of the flesh  
Was lifted now, and he was free from pain.  
I think Elysium rang with loud applause  
The day he crossed its threshold,  
And Will Rogers, Mark Twain and Dr. Holmes,  
And all the rest who sweetened life  
With parables of fun,  
Must have greeted him with tears of joy  
As he passed through the gates of Time  
Into Eternity.

His writings left this world  
A happier place in which to live  
Than when he entered it;  
And that other sphere must now be brighter  
That Irvin Cobb is there.  
His native town, Paducah,  
Ever tugged at Irvin's heartstrings  
Like a magnet reaching out for iron filings,  
And the star that represents Kentucky  
On Old Glory's field of blue,  
Was to him the Alpha luminary  
Of that brilliant constellation.

The Redbud Tree,  
Although it flaunts a royal bloom,

Recalls the greatest of all tragedies,  
Because the traitor, Judas,  
Hanged himself from it;  
But now a common gnarled tree  
Becomes the symbol of the joyous life,  
Since Irvin Cobb bestowed his ashes  
On a dogwood shrub,  
And designated it his living  
And his only monument.



## *George Colvin*

HE ever had one purpose in his heart—  
To strike the shackles from the feet of youth,  
Whether they were iron or golden fetters  
Binding to the sordid ways of men,  
And set them free upon the road to mountain tops.  
He knew the boy and loved him,  
Even as the Sun, the Earth,—  
The Sun that quickens every inert clod  
With miracle of renaissance;  
So he touched adolescent life  
With energies of new birth,  
And put a vision in the soul,  
A song upon the lips;  
Reanimated and reclaimed young men,  
Though he found them driving stupid beast of burden  
To the treadmill for a little grist,  
Or digging gold and silver  
At the foot of old Parnassus.

He was a warrior and a leader,  
Though little understood;  
Because, unlike the Caesars and Napoleons,  
He loved the truth  
Far dearer than the praise of men;  
And prized the king more highly than his crown;  
And ever placed humanity  
Above conventions of the world.  
Although he loved the quiet vale  
As much as thundering Sinai,  
He knew the trail that leads

From darkling cove to sun-crowned peak.  
It is a devious and a rugged road.  
But he had traveled it himself,  
And though he found it *Via Dolorosa*  
With a crown of thorns toward the end,  
It was the path the Master trod,  
The way to service and to God.

This brave, intrepid Heart  
Did not forget the route is often paved  
With jagged flint and shard,  
And yet, although compassionate,  
He strove with all but Titan strength  
To put a new light in the brain,  
A stronger courage in the soul;  
And with the genius of a fearless faith  
To point the way to Mount Olympus  
And the stars.



## *Daniel Boone*

SPEAKS FROM HIS TOMB OVERLOOKING THE RIVER  
AND THE CAPITOL

**I** LOVE Kentucky.

A hundred years her hundred streams  
Have poured their waters through my dreams;  
A hundred years her bluegrass plains  
And wooded hills have been my fanes.

God never made a land

More beautiful than Kentucky.

I loved her when the savage hand

Was wet with blood of pioneer;

The rugged beauty of the river flowing near

My resting place

Still moves me with the joy of ancient days.

And looking out across the space

Of green and blue upon that gem of art,

Kentucky's Capitol, ablaze

In sunset or in the golden haze

Of autumn, I know the heart

That placed it there did also love

Kentucky.

But there is beauty far above

What any eye

Has ever looked upon in cloud or sky.

O lovers and guardians of Kentucky,

Out yonder is a little child who craves the light;

Out yonder is a clouded heart that can not see aright

The rainbow's finest colorings.

Back yonder is a soul that never sings.

If you would honor me



Who first loved beautiful Kentucky,  
Dispel the darkness of the feud,  
Illume the night of ignorance and servitude,  
Turn on the blazing light of Truth  
That all may see.

## *Lot's Wife*

WHEN Lot, the Bible tells us,  
With his little festive wife,  
Was hiking out of Sodom,  
Fairly fleeing for his life,  
So thick were ashes falling,  
And so hot the fiery hail,  
The running wasn't extra  
When the couple hit the trail.  
The story says the husband  
Hastened faster than the wife,  
By forty rods of travel,  
When the woman heard a fife,  
Or Canaanitish syrinx,  
Playing oriental jazz,  
And stopped and went to dancing  
Just as many a woman has,  
Although the Lord has warned her  
And the preacher's tried to show  
The Devil's in the fiddle  
When the tickle's in the toe.  
But Lottie grew defiant,  
And she shouted out to Lot:  
"Now watch me shake the shimmy here,  
And hit the turkey trot."  
But when she saw Gomorrah  
In the frenzy of the dance,  
And then toward burning Sodom  
Threw one longing, loving glance,  
An angry flame shot upward  
To the heaven's starry vault,

And Lottie dancing sinner  
Was a pillar now of salt.  
And still she stands there gleaming  
And I think and wonder as  
I listen to this modern  
Awful, raucous, ragtime jazz.  
But what if we poor creatures  
Do cavort and rant and balk  
At such outlandish music,  
And the beastly camel walk,  
The cows just lick complacently  
What once was Mrs. Lot,  
And bless the shimmy shiver  
And the charming turkey trot.



## *Shot*

P REACHER stopped and called a counsel,  
He had baptised forty-eight,  
But the schoolma'am, Mandy Hounsel,  
Rose above three hundredweight.

How could a lean five-foot preacher  
Baptise her without a slip?

"Think that he can lift the teacher?"

"What if he should lose his grip?"

All the hillside, silent, wondered,  
Here and there a smothered sob;  
Mandy looked at least four hundred  
Standing by the Reverend Cob.

Then a poor half-witted creature,  
Known about the town as Shot,  
Shouted out, "Say, Misther Preacher,  
Lead her in and let her squat."

## *Uncle Cy's Profanity*

D OCTORS air a dad-burn bunch.  
Call one and he'll thump and punch  
Axin' what you et for lunch.  
(Testin' for the bellyache  
When it's bunions takes the cake.)  
Wrap a rag around your arm;  
Makes you think of some witch charm.  
Pump it full of air and sigh,  
"Blood pressure's mighty high."

'Pendix must come out at once;  
Teeth no doubt abscessed for months."  
Like a judge assessin' fines,  
"Gall bladder is cuttin' shines.  
Need a liver pill or two.  
But I think we'll pull you through."  
'Zackly what my Doctor said,  
Gravely shakin' of the head.  
Then I scringed, "I have no fears,  
Had these false teeth now for years.  
Gall bladder and 'pendix, too,  
Furnished surgeon revenue  
Long ago. But I called you  
'Bout the bunion on my toe."  
Took my pulse once more. "I know,  
But I'm looking for the pus,  
That's the stuff that makes the fuss."  
Now you know I never cuss.  
Strongest oath so far had been,  
*Pshaw, pshaw, pshaw*, or maybe *shucks*,  
But his bill for fifty bucks,  
Swept me from my self-control  
And I snorted, "'Pon my soul!"  
Lord, I know this was profane,  
But my toe was raisin' cain.

### *The Deacon Militant*

WHEN Deacon Sikes arose to speak  
He shouted, "I believe—"  
But here his mouth began to leak.  
He wiped it on his sleeve.



“Now I believe that God made man,  
And made him out of mud.  
This church has got to put a ban,—”  
The Deacon lost his cud;

But whether he had swallowed it  
Or only spat it out,  
Nobody seemed quite definite,  
And I am still in doubt.

The house was in an awful din.  
Some said the Deacon swore.  
Tobacco juice ran down his chin;  
He used his sleeve once more.

“If I believed I had one drop  
Of beast blood in my veins,—”  
He drew his knife, “Stop, Deacon, stop.”  
“Then jist one wuhd remains:

“I haint got nary thing agin  
This preacher’s charhacter;  
But if he thinks that I am kin  
To monkeys, that’s a slur

“That I won’t stand. Call me a brute!  
Saints and seraphim!  
But I’ve a notion now to shoot  
Hell right out o’ him.”



## *Up To Date*

JOHNNY SOLILOQUIZES

THEY aint no use for horses now,  
Since Pap has got his Ford—  
Just cranks her up and takes the wheel,  
And hollers, "All aboard."  
Then Ma climbs in with Babe in front,  
And Mike and Dan and Cass,  
And me and Lize piles in behind,  
And Pap turns on the gas.

They's just no use of talkin', now,  
You ought to see her dart,  
And hit the road knee-deep in dust,  
And git there 'fore you start.  
We live ten miles from meetin' but  
The singin' ain't begun,  
Nor nary man gone in the house,  
When Pap completes the run.

When Lizzy puffs up smokin' like  
A pot of frankincense,  
The horses break their bridles and  
Tear down ten yards of fence;  
For Pap in his long whiskers and  
His tourin' attire,  
Looks just like old Elijy in  
His Chariot of fire.

The taller candle and the lamp  
Has winked and dimmed away,

Since this newfangled Edison  
Makes night as light as day;  
The sanitary drinkin' cup  
Has plum knocked out the gourd,  
The thoroughbred's turned out to grass,  
Since Pap has got his Ford.

Ma wears her dresses cut in style  
Hiked way above her shoes,  
And autymobile veil and hat  
Like all the tourists use;  
But dog my cats if I don't wish—  
Pap looks so cussed weird—  
He'd get a safety razor now  
And try it on his beard.

## *Uncle Bob on Sanitation*

SANITATION's come to town,  
Women rippin' up and down,  
Every street and alleyway,  
Lookin' out for germs, they say.  
Hear 'em on the public square,  
Courthouse, meetin' everywhere,  
Speechify and rare and charge  
Hogs shan't longer run at large,  
Nor a billygoat or cow—  
Got to keep 'em all up now.  
Even dogs, they say, has fleas;  
Man, by gare, can't even sneeze.  
Got to wash now once a week  
In a bathtub, 'stead of creek.  
I'll be derved if I don't bet  
Have to get a toothbrush yet.  
Unkempt Bolsheviki shags  
Full of germs as alley rags.  
Claim that now a vandyke gem  
Ain't entirely free of them.  
Shave your mustache clean as silk,  
Or cut out your buttermilk.  
Baby mustn't suck his thumb;  
Girls can't use their last night's gum  
'Less the bedpost's sterilized.  
I'll not be one bit surprized  
If the court don't make a law  
When the Old Man kisses Maw,  
Both must wear a veil of gauze  
In this sanitation cause.



I'm for prohibition straight,  
One per cent as much as eight,  
Brandy, beer, or wine or gin;  
But in kissin' I'm agin  
Usin' gauze or any trick  
That will minimize the kick.

## *Aunt Bet on New Deal CBA*

AUNT BET says, "Well, 'pon my word  
Ef 'taint gettin plumb absurd  
Way the women's actin' now,  
Makin' sich a big powwow  
Ever time a baby come.  
Can't have one no more to hum.  
Horsepitul and whitecap nuss,  
High-priced Doctur. What a fuss!  
I've had twelve and Granny Grime  
All I needed any time.  
Never lost a single one.  
Nussed 'em, too, is what I done.  
Nary one of all my brood  
Ever hyerd of Mellin's food.  
Never took a pizen shot  
To cure somethin' they ain't got.  
Now the day a child is born,  
Docturs, nusses, friends all warn  
Baby never must be kissed.  
Got to git a specialist  
To purscribe jist what to give  
Ur the child will never live.  
Nusses treat 'em like a pup,  
Tag 'em, then git tags mixed up,  
And the one that you have borne  
May be hern, may be yourn.  
'Pon my word a 'ristocrat  
May turn out a common brat.  
'Cordin' to the midwives tales,  
Genyuses are born with veils.  
S'pose now in this new campaign  
They come wrapped in sellerfane.

## *One-Armed Joe*

BUB'S EULOGY

RICOLLECT ol' One-Armed Joe?  
Lost it grindin' cane.  
Same blamed feller 'at used to go  
Round with Lizy Jane,  
Grindin' sorghum ever fall.  
Lizy Jane wuz Joe's ol' mare;  
Never showed her at a fair,  
But blamed if she couldn't beat all  
Ringster to an ol' cane sweep  
'At ever stepped a mile. Never fat,  
Ring bone, bobtail 'n' all that,  
But law! she made the cane mill weep.

An' us chillern, we'd allus go  
Over where they's grindin' cane,  
And hear the jokes of One-Armed Joe,  
And git to ride ol' Lizy Jane,  
And maybe git the sorghum skimmin's,  
Thuzzent allus so many wimmins  
Bozzin' roun', cause One-Armed Joe,  
He loved us chillern bettern them.  
(Bet he wears a diadem  
In the world where preachers go.)

Joe had grit an' feelin's, too,  
An' they wuzzent nothin' he couldn't do,  
'Cept to do another harm:  
Ketch a possum, kill a bear,  
Cuss and dance and lead in prayer;



Jump a rope or skin a cat,  
Sing a song or guess a riddle,  
Make a speech or play the fiddle—  
No Joe couldn't quite do that,  
Cause One-Armed Joe had lost an arm;  
But that's all he couldn't do.

One night dogs treed a coon  
Up a leanin' poplar tree.  
Joe could by the glimmerin' moon  
See the leanin' poplar lent.  
Jerked his coat an' up he went.  
Ketched the possum, let him go,  
Slipped his holts and hollered, "Oh!"  
And down into eternity,  
Limp and warm, fell poor ol' Joe.  
Don't remember One-Armed Joe?  
Feller I'll bet the angels know!

### *Harlan Tite*

OLD HARLAN TITE had come to town  
To see if things had been marked down.  
He always waited for the sales  
From hickory shirts to shingle nails.  
And now the holidays had passed,  
It seemed high prices couldn't last;  
And he was right: There was a crash  
Of twenty-five per cent for cash.  
Straw hats been cut square in two,  
Although they looked as good as new;

And Palm Beach suits had also dropped,  
And all the stores, it seemed, had chopped  
Their prices some on Christmas goods,  
Like china dolls and baby hoods.  
Farm implements were very low—  
The sickle, scythe and garden hoe.  
But Harlan fingered with his cash  
Still looking for a bigger slash,  
And here it was: a pyramid  
Of laundry soap that almost hid  
The picture of a silver lake,  
With Venus rising from the foam—  
Big Deal was down to five a cake,  
“A giant size for every home!”  
The longer Harlan stood and gazed,  
The more and more he was amazed.  
He smothered back a rising oath,  
He felt his three weeks’ shaggy growth,  
And saw that he was in a pickle.  
“I didn’t think of this expense  
And needed all my fifty cents  
To buy that marked down sickle;  
But I’ll be derved if that’s the dope,  
I’ve shaved my last time with lye soap,  
So long as Big Deal’s just a nickle.”



## *The Good Old Country School*

**H**AVE you ever heard the story  
of the Good Old Country School  
With its rude split-bottom benches  
and its ancient Dunce's Stool,  
Where Webster's Blue-back Speller  
was long the standard text,  
And supplied the place of grammar,  
which our late forefathers vexed;  
Where they never heard of Latin or  
the Greek Subjunctive mode,  
But sang their multiplication  
like a patriotic ode.

The Master, he was skinny,  
with a lean and hungry look  
And a countenance as placid  
as a frozen winter brook.  
His brow was broad and Grecian,  
and his eye was snell and keen,  
And his head was stuffed with knowledge  
of a dozen books, I ween;  
And they say his nose was Roman  
as the bill of any hawk,  
And his boys were all perfection  
for they had to walk the chalk.

And yet I've often wondered  
if they really always walked,  
And sat upright like statues,  
and never laughed and talked;



For I've often heard my father say  
the model of the school  
Got licked at least three times a day,  
as a pretty general rule,  
And lament the good old method,  
as a lost forgotten art,  
Of imparting knowledge in a way  
that made a fellow *smart*.

I wish I had the secret  
of making boys walk,  
Instead of always watching for  
a chance to throw some chalk;  
But the art, I think, was buried  
with the Blue-back Spelling Book,  
And the piercing eye of Skinny  
that no mortal boy could brook;  
It was buried with the benches  
and the ancient Dunce's Stool,  
And the grease-glazed paper windows  
of the good old country school.

It may be through psychology  
and this mollycoddle stuff,  
We often talk in classrooms,  
we've lost the power to bluff;  
Perhaps 'twas Pestalozzi,  
or maybe John Herbart,  
Who robbed the wand of Skinny  
of its pedagogic art;  
We'll not discuss philosophy,  
but we know about the chalk  
That no theoretic dream of man  
can make a boy walk.

## *Squire Easy of Greasy Creek*

OLD SQUIRE OBADIAH EASY  
Lived up on the head of Greasy,  
Forty years a magistrate  
Way back there in district eight,—  
Best district in all Kentucky,—  
That is in the way of law.  
When old Easy set his jaw  
The offender sure was lucky  
If he didn't get the limit.  
I have heard him pronounce sentence  
With a prayer that brought repentance;  
Then again I've heard him hymn it  
To the tune, "Amazing Grace."  
Old Squire was a legal ace,  
And he brought down many a Hun  
With his magisterial gun.  
Crime in district number eight  
Had small chance to celebrate.

Still old Easy was peculiar.  
Once I heard him say, "I rule yer  
Case is lackin' legal merit,  
Constable, though right in sperit.  
The defendant, Charley Reed,  
Don't deny he done the deed.  
But that was up in deestRICT three.  
This by law is my decree:  
If I git the pleadin' straight,  
Reed resides in deestRICT eight.  
Then as resident uv the same,



Has the sacred right to claim  
'Pearance here at home on Greasy."  
Here old Obadiah Easy  
Blew his nose; his voice grew wheezy:  
"What if he shot up the meetin',  
Blowed the lights out, give a beaten'  
To old Parson George McGee?  
That wuz done in deestric three,  
Up on Redbird, and by Gare,  
I maintain that law and order  
Aint my job away up there,  
Ner beyond old Greasy border.  
Hear ye then, my verdict, hear!  
He pleads guilty, and comes clean."



## *In Babylon*

I WALKED the streets of Babylon  
One dark and weary night,  
And saw within the palace walls  
The flare of brilliant light.

Belshazzar with his thousand lords  
Had thronged the banquet hall,  
When suddenly some cryptic words  
Appeared upon the wall:

*Mene, mene, tekel, peres,—*  
Done by a mystic Hand.  
Belshazzar stared with frightened eyes,  
But could not understand.

Then Daniel spoke: "Hear, now, O King,  
Thy life has been in vain;  
Weighed art thou now and wanting found,  
And shalt this night be slain."

I could not see the Handwriting,  
Or hear the voice within;  
I thought the King a jolly Prince,  
Nor knew of his great sin:

His order that the Temple Cups  
That once held sacred wine,  
Be brought and filled, and then profaned  
By lip of concubine.

Not knowing this I wished that I  
Might wear a lordship's gown;  
And sit at great Belshazzar's feast,  
And gaze upon his crown.

With aching heart I stumbled on  
And thought on Courts and Kings,  
And man's great inhumanities,  
And old unhappy things.

Hungry I reached my little hut,  
Once dark, now light as day,  
And placed my hand upon the latch,  
But feared I'd lost my way.

I entered in and looked around,  
And found a Stranger there,  
Who fed me on the Bread of Life  
In understanding prayer.

*III*

*POEMS CHIEFLY  
REGIONAL*





## *Along a Country Road*

THE Country Road was blazing hot that August afternoon  
But a mockingbird was practicing a brand new tune.  
Overhead a robber crow was crying *caw caw*,  
And jogging down the dusty pike here's what I heard and saw:

A little Mrs. Bobwhite calling to her mate;  
A hired hand in overalls patching up a gate;  
Three Jersey milk cows standing in a pool;  
A negro in a stubblefield plowing with a mule;  
A sunbonnet woman on a slow limping nag,  
Chicken heads sticking from her burlap bag;  
The roadside sown with yellow butterflies;  
Sunflowers staring with their big brown eyes;  
Ironweeds, hollyhocks, evergreen pines;  
A railfence overrun with poison ivy vines;  
A woodpecker rapping on a dead oak limb,  
An idiotic jaybird laughing at him.  
Bluewings, redbreasts flashing here and there;  
Yellowhammers, meadow larks, grackle everywhere;  
A sheeny little hummingbird's pretty ruby throat;  
A topknotted cardinal's sacerdotal coat;  
Tree toads', jarflies', katydids' song;  
Music by the earful all day long.  
What a panorama on a hot summer day  
For any real poet passing down this way.

## *Beauty Springing from a Clod*

IF with open eye I go  
Over hills, in vales below,  
Anywhere I turn I find  
Beauty all but smites me blind:  
Fields of poppies, marigold,  
Wild verbenas manifold;  
Honeysuckle, flowering vine,  
Lupin, larkspur, columbine;  
Orchid, pansy, passion flower  
Singing in a fairy bower;  
Goldenrod and regal rose,—  
Sonnets, triolets, rondeaus—  
Lyrics in raceme and sheaf,  
Purge the heart of unbelief,—  
Beauty springing from a clod—  
Surely Beauty must be God.



## *Our Wedding Day*

WE passed through fields where cowslips grew,  
Now tipped with drops of morning dew,  
And heard the redbird's polished note  
That seemed to glisten from his throat.  
The bluebirds flashed and flashed and flew,  
And looked askance as if they knew.  
The purple wild convolvuli  
Tangled the feet and smote the eye.  
The mockingbird and hermit thrush  
Were whistling from the near-by brush  
The old old tune all lovers know  
As through the fields of joy they go.  
And Lucy squeezed my hand and said,  
"Those field larks are already wed.  
The oriole is on her nest;  
That jaybird has a brand new crest."  
And I replied, "Then why delay  
Another hour the wedding day?"  
But Lucy answered, "Love, not yet,—  
Not while the grass with dew is wet.  
Let's wait a day, at least," she said.  
"Now when the sumac's plumes are red,  
The ironweeds purple in the glen,  
And goldenrod's abloom, and when  
The vines that trail the old rail fence  
Are crimson in their eloquence;  
The gourds around our cottage door,  
The pumpkins on our granary floor  
Have ripened in the autumn sun;  
And when our cider making's done,

The pantry full of fruit and jam,  
And quince preserves and age-old ham,  
All waiting for Thanksgiving Day,  
Then bring the priest and let him stay  
The whole week through, and if we think  
The time is ripe, we'll eat and drink,  
And let him read the marriage vows  
Beneath that old oak's moss-grown boughs."  
"But Lucy, dear, it's only June.  
Please listen to the tender tune  
Of yonder Bobwhite; hear him say  
'Oh, Autumn is so far away.' "  
"All right then, go and bring the priest;  
But we can't have a wedding feast."

## *Mullein*

A SHAGGY weed in barren field,  
The Mullein of no benefit;  
Year in year out its only yield  
More little mulleins just like it.

Ignored entirely by the bard,  
Who sings of Rose and Daffodil,  
Of Crocus blooming in the yard,  
And Goldenrod upon the hill.

Misprized, unsung, and while it lives  
Loved only of the sun and breeze;  
Discovered by the chemist, gives  
Its fruitless life to heal disease.

And many a good-for-nothing hind,  
The ragshag of democracy—  
Mere mullein of the human kind—  
Has died to keep us rich and free.



## *Revelation*

FROM youth I read much poetry;  
And then a Master came.  
He taught my mind's eye how to see,  
And lit a hungry flame.

The Titan poets, now I find,  
And even the lesser choir,  
Reveal a depth of heart and mind  
And speak with tongues of fire.

If I could with the Master walk,  
As Peter did, and John,  
Through lily fields and hear Him talk  
Of each phenomenon,

I might learn what the insect knows,  
The wisdom of the ant;  
The explanation of the rose  
And every flowering plant;

And how the silkworm spins the thread  
That makes the finest cloth,  
Then rises from a silken bed  
And turns into a moth.

And I might learn where wild geese go  
To have their summer swim;  
And understand the polar glow,  
If I could walk with Him.

## *Fame*

WHY should I ever dream of fame?  
The unlettered man of whom I sing,  
Worthy, but an underling,  
Will never know my name:  
Blacksmith Sid whose anvil rings  
With joy of building many things;  
Poor old Tom who will not shirk  
The humblest, dirtiest kind of work;  
Wagoner Joe whom nobody knows;  
Umbrella Jim in vagabond clothes;  
Toilers in shops and down in the mines  
Where neither the sun nor the moon ever shines;  
Denizens of the serving world  
Who keep our country's flag unfurled—  
A myriad folk and polyglot,  
Who have my heart but know me not,  
And never read my lines.

If I could only be loved by these,  
I'd welcome the attic bed  
With its hardly more than a crust of bread  
And life devoid of ease.  
But well I know when I am dead  
The songs I've sung of them—  
Lyrics with which I've crowned their head—  
My only diadem,—  
Will pass with me, unknown, unread.

But singing is its own reward,  
When harp is true and tongue's aflame;  
Then keep me ever singing, Lord,  
With never a thought of fame.

## *The Log Cabin*

I LOVE the old Log Cabin where our brilliant Uncle Sam  
Was born and grew to manhood; where there wasn't  
any sham;  
But only truth and loyalty, and hope and one desire  
Of those around the hearthstone of a blazing big log fire;  
Where they discussed the future and confessed their faith  
in Him  
Who weighs us in the balances; and sang of seraphim;  
Gave thanks for opportunity to plant and sow and reap  
And help to build a modern state of strong and ample sweep.  
Here men and women pioneered, felled trees  
and drained the bogs;  
And put up with discomforts in a cabin built of logs.  
But from these homes great men have sprung  
and won a wide renown,  
Bestowing on America a many-jewelled crown.  
This old one-room log cabin with its memories and charms  
Might well be Freedom's symbol and our Country's  
Coat of Arms.



## *Genre*

A RIDGE of clouds in western sky,  
Fresh washed in liquid gold;  
An unknown bird in distant wold,  
Tonguing a lonely cry.

A farmhouse in a dreamy mood  
Back from the country lane;  
Beyond the house a field of grain,  
Near by a strip of wood.

An orchard of fruit-laden trees,  
A row of hollyhocks;  
Peafowls and strutting turkey cocks,  
And twenty hives of bees.

Three yellow lazy, long-eared dogs,  
And fifty Wyandottes;  
Two little blue-eyed towhead tots  
And grandpa slopping hogs.

A farm hand in from plowing corn,  
Astride a sweaty mule,  
Watering at the springhouse pool—  
Poor beast, a drudge baseborn.

A cow down by the milking gap,  
Licking her little calf;  
A milkmaid and her merry laugh,  
A hound pup's peevish yap.

Corn in the troughs, hay in the mows,  
And horses in their stalls;

Fowls on the roost, an owl's weird calls  
And all the earth adrowse.

The stars a million points of light,  
After the close of day;  
The odor of a summer's night  
From fields of sweetening hay.

Rest well-earned, the chores all done,  
The House asleep in peace;  
The shrill-voiced cackling barnyard geese,  
Hailing another sun.

## *Laurel*

SHE sits beneath her chestnut tree  
And breathes the fragrant air—  
My Sylvia who waits for me  
With blossoms in her hair.

Last May on yonder mountainside  
She broke a laurel spray  
And promised there to be my bride  
A year from that glad day.

A bullfrog played his big bassoon,  
The brown thrush must have heard,  
For soon the woodlands rang with tune  
Of every kind of bird.

There's not another bloom of earth  
That can at all compare  
With laurel's beauty or its worth  
To crown a love affair.

Tomorrow is our wedding day  
And I shall climb up there  
Where laurel grows and pluck a spray  
To deck her golden hair.



## *The Jaybird and the Turtledove*

DEEP in the gloomy wood I heard  
The moaning of a pensive bird,  
And now and then a serious hoot.  
A Bluejay blew his jazzy flute:  
“Why now this silly melancholy?  
All birdland should be always jolly.  
The wildflowers have begun to bloom,  
And there’s no reason now for gloom.  
Young April decks the countryside  
With royal touch; I led my bride  
To altar only yesterday.  
We’ll honeymoon through all of May.”

The woodlands rang with loud applause;  
The streamlet heard, but did not pause  
To listen to another’s speech—  
The owl’s, whose home was in the beech,  
Near by the entrance to the wood:  
“No jaybird ever understood.  
His thoughts are always selfish, thin.  
No sense of moral right or sin.  
He scorns the thrush and mockingbird,  
And swears their music’s most absurd;  
Derides the theory of germs,  
And feasts on bugs and angleworms;  
Has only lust—no depth of love,  
And laughs to scorn the turtledove,  
And calls her just a mourning nun,  
Always at pious orison.  
The jaybird’s crop is overfed,

But not his vain and shallow head.  
That turtledove recalls the flood,  
And when she thinks of all the blood  
That's spilled today in brutal war—  
The greed of modern Minotaur—  
The forty days and nights of rain  
Come back to her with ancient pain—  
She's living in the ark again."

## *The Tortoise and the Butterfly*

DIOGENES, the Tortoise, said  
To Sappho Butterfly:  
“You seem so young; how old are you?”  
Papilia made reply:  
“About a half a summer old,”  
And winked a roguish eye.

“You poets are idealists  
And always up in air;  
You hardly ever touch the earth,  
But flit around and swear  
You worship only beauty and  
Seem wholly unaware

“That when the summer’s over, and  
The pentecost of bloom  
Has passed into oblivion,  
The absent dining room,  
On which a poet feasts his soul,  
Will spell your certain doom.

“Now I have lived a hundred years  
Within this armored shell,  
And seen you poets come and go,  
And watched the Carrousel  
For one brief season every year,  
Then heard the passing bell.

“There’s danger in the sunlit field  
With many an enemy;



You'd better play it safe and heed  
My wise philosophy:  
*Crawl back in to your chrysalis*  
*And live a century."*

"You do not live at all, old man;  
You have a shallow pate.  
You feed on insectivora;  
In winter hibernate;  
Indifferent to Nature's voice  
You only vegetate.

"That old Greek cynic, your namesake,  
Whose home was in a tub,  
Berated every luxury  
And raised a big hubbub.  
I'd smash that shell wherein you dwell,  
If I could swing a club.

"You crabbed old Diogenes,  
Why don't you come out doors,  
And try the wine of poetry,  
In gardens, meads and moors?  
One day of such a life is worth  
A century of yours."

## *Holiness*

A PILGRIM trudging one dark night  
Along a lonely road  
Descried a feeble candlelight  
In Friar John's abode.

He knocked upon the cabin door,  
And heard the man at prayer.  
The Friar rose and crossed the floor  
And proffered him a chair.

The welcome of the holy man  
Was genuine, benign;  
He gave the spent pedestrian  
Black bread and sour wine,—

The pious hermit's only fare;  
And then prepared a bed—  
A hempen mattress stuffed with hair—  
No pillow for his head.

The pilgrim slept while anchorite  
Arose and smote his breast  
And agonized in prayer, till light  
Awoke the toil-worn guest,—

A carpenter who wrought for men  
In blazing noonday sun,  
And often through long hours, when  
The summer day was done,

Administered among the poor,  
And sometimes those in jail,

Or entered in at lowly door  
To find the Holy Grail.

And now he thanked his host for bread—  
This human manikin—  
Who lashed himself and shaved his head  
To purge his soul of sin,

And left the monk on bended knee  
And hurried on his way,  
And thought of all the work that he  
Had planned to do that day.



## *In the Pawnshop*

WHEN passing by the three-ball shop  
I often falter, sometimes stop  
To see old Feinstein's new display  
His windows offer every day.  
Binoculars "Some pirate lost";  
A fancy pistol, pearl-embossed,  
"Once owned and used by Billy the Kid";  
A lamp from "King Tut's pyramid";  
A Stradivarius violin,  
"Pronounced by experts genuine";  
An ancient clock of German make.  
I gaze till with collector's ache  
I finger all my ready cash  
And calculate. Then in a flash  
I note a volume old and worn,  
The covers lost and badly torn,  
And several leaves entirely gone.  
The title read "Endymion."  
The book was autographed by Keats.  
My heart was racing, losing beats.  
I turned the pages on and on  
And saw the name of Fanny Brawne  
That Keats had scrawled in trembling hand.  
"My Lord, am I in Fairyland?"  
I whispered to fluttering heart.  
The volume almost fell apart.  
And here was Shelley's signature.  
Ah, who can understand the lure?  
The names of Landor, Byron, Hunt.  
I thought I heard old Feinstein grunt.

I tried to gain my self-control.  
This book would put me on the dole.  
Indifferently I asked the price—  
My head was hot, my feet like ice—  
Then Feinstein said, "If you will buy  
This famous gun, I think that I  
Will throw that old torn volume in."  
I thought, "How can a man so sin  
To ask three hundred for a gun  
And underprize this benison?"  
I took him up and paid him ten,  
And pawned the killer's gun again.  
But oh, I itched, I was so mad  
To blow out all the brains he had.

## *The Smithy*

WHEN I played at tops and marbles  
In the old white dusty road,  
Though the bluebird in the beech tree  
Was practicing an ode,  
If I heard the anvil ringing  
In my father's blacksmith shop,  
I would gather up my marbles  
And forget about my top,  
For I'd rather watch the sparkles  
As the sledges hit the iron;  
And the sounding of the anvil  
Was as luring as a siren.  
The slacktub was a mystery  
As were the forge and bellows,  
And the flickering shadows on the walls  
Were little fairy fellows.

The smithy was a rendezvous  
For farmers in the spring,  
Who brought their hoes and harrow teeth,  
Their plowpoints—everything—  
And had them sharpened up and ready  
For the turning of the sod;  
And many brought their horses then  
And had them freshly shod.  
They would sit around and gossip  
Of the price of corn and wheat,  
And talk about the damage done  
By cutworms and the cheat,  
And how they had to rotate crops



And fertilize the soil,  
And then got almost nothing  
For their labor and their toil.  
The gamblers and the money sharks  
That run the Board of Trade,  
They said, got all the profits  
That the farmers should have made;  
And even on tobacco  
They had forced the market down—  
Nobody now could make a cent  
Unless he lived in town.

I didn't understand their talk—  
Some words they'd hiss and mumble—  
But they could squirt tobacco juice  
And grumble, grumble, grumble,  
While sledge and hammer smote the iron  
And played the xylophone,  
For the anvil was an instrument  
That had a magic tone.

Long years have passed since those glad days  
In father's blacksmith shop,  
When I was just a little lad  
An unkempt "Cotton Top";  
But even now the bluebird's note  
Reminding me of spring,  
Brings back the grumbling farmers  
And I hear the anvils ring.

## Prince Charming

WHEN he arrived on Christmas Eve  
The country dance was in full swing.  
His look of every inch a king  
Put all the women on *qui vive*.

Just where he came from no one knew,  
But it was very plain to see  
He had the marks of a *grandee*,  
Who often had a rendezvous

With rich and famous men of earth.  
No doubt he had achieved great fame,  
And often glorified the name  
That had distinguished him from birth.

From what he said he had been round  
This little globe, oh, many times;  
Had written reams and reams of rhymes  
And authored many books profound.

He owned a large estate in Maine,  
And city blocks in Boston town;  
Like Caesar had refused a crown,  
And could have been the king of Spain.

Unguardedly his cash ran out—  
He needed fifty right away;  
He owned a gold mine in Malay,  
Of which there seemed to be no doubt.

He loathed, he said to write a check  
For such a small amount as this;

Back home in his metropolis  
The Bank would say, "Well what the heck?"

He must have fifty on the spot—  
He'd give his check, of course, but then  
He'd make it for a hundred yen.  
"What difference with all I've got?"

Then Margie Fox said, "Papa, dear,  
You always have a big fat roll:  
I'd like to take him for a stroll—  
He's handsome, and I'm sure sincere."

Sam Fox shelled out because of Marge;  
The check was for five hundred bucks.  
"I won't accept," said Fox. "Oh shucks,  
I should have made it twice as large."

The dance was on; the millionaire  
And Margie Fox swept down the line.  
The young men glared, "The dirty swine";  
The girls breathed hard and eyed the pair.

Next day the wandering knight had fled,  
Adventuring in other lands;  
Sam Fox was left with empty hands,  
And Margie wishing she was dead.



## *The Miner's Dream*

DEEP in the earth with shovel and pick  
He toils the long night through—  
Weary he dreams with every lick  
Of things that coal will do.

He hears the turning of the wheels  
In factories and shops;  
He sees the stream of automobiles;  
Production never stops,

Of tanks and jeeps and bombing planes,  
And guns of many kinds;  
And engines drawing long freight trains—  
The work of master minds.

He thinks of all the household things—  
The luxuries of life;  
The comforts that invention brings  
To every good housewife.

And all dependent on the coal  
That furnishes the steam,  
And largely under his control.  
So runs the miner's dream

That quickens every noble thought  
And strengthens every stroke;  
The key to all that man has wrought  
To smash the slavish yoke.

## *Mystically Calling*

SOMETHING in meadow and mountain and sea  
Is mystically calling to me—  
Something in desert and moorland and wood—  
Strangely alluring, and felt in the blood  
As April is felt in the tree:  
The incandescent flash  
Of wandering insect wing,  
As myriads dart and dash,  
Madly meandering;  
The hum of a million bees  
In petaled orchard trees;  
The miracle of leaf and bloom,  
Conceived in Nature's womb;  
The sunrise jubilee,  
With song in every tree;  
Day's royal winding shroud,  
In billowy golden cloud;  
The infinite dome of stars;  
The planets, Venus, Mars;  
The wild geese's honking flight,  
Arrowing through the night—  
All these disturb my heart and brain  
With joy that's almost pain,—  
With passionate yearning to live again,  
Untrammelled of flesh and holding the key  
To beauty, love and mystery,  
Where only immortal foot has trod—  
At one with Truth, Infinity and God.

## *Ambition*

IF I could know just what I'd like to know,  
Would it be to understand  
The atom in a grain of sand,  
Or crystal in a flake of snow?  
Would I crave to comprehend  
The beginning and the end  
Of Time and Life, or apprehend  
The mysteries of Radio?  
If I could know just what I'd like to know.

If I could do just what I'd like to do,  
Would I slay old Tyranny,  
And enthrone Democracy,  
No creed could stain or war subdue?  
Would I elect to build a school  
That some day might evolve a rule  
To make a wise man of a fool,  
And change the false into the true?  
If I could do just what I'd like to do.

If I could be just what I'd like to be,  
Would I choose me judge or priest,  
Potentate of all the East,  
And ruler over every sea?  
What title would I most prefer?  
Scientist or barrister,  
Scholar, sage, philosopher?  
Sculptor, painter, prince, grandee?  
If I could be just what I'd like to be.



If I could have my dearest wish, although  
I covet much, 'twould be to find  
What dims the eye or makes it blind  
To beauty in the mistletoe,  
Or to the million stars of night.  
And I would fain restore the sight;  
Oh, I would be a bard with might  
To sing till every eye could see,  
If I could be just what I'd like to be.

## *Reincarnation*

TO S.S.N.

IT may be that we lived and loved in ages long ago,  
And grazed our flocks together where Sicilian waters flow;  
Or watched the shepherd clouds and dreamed of pastures  
    in the sky,  
Or played upon the rustic reed for lovers passing by.  
I may have been a Norman knight and you a Saxon queen,  
Who held the Castle of my heart as part of your demesne.  
Who knows but I was Romeo and you the Capulet  
That hated every Montague, my stainless Juliet?  
Or maybe I was Abelard and you were Eloise;  
Perhaps we fled for life and love across the stormy seas.  
I do not know, I do not care, but this I ask of fate:  
That I may never live again where you are not my mate.  
I could not see the glint of gold upon another's hair,  
I could not know the joys of life unless I found you there;  
I would not have another's head to rest upon my breast,  
I could not let another touch the lips that you have pressed.  
Reincarnation here on earth without your hair, your eyes?  
I could not know a second love beyond the shining skies.

## *The Mule*

I saw him standing in a barren field,  
Head adroop as in a dream.  
His shoulder blades and vertebrae  
Had almost pierced the dried and rusty skin.  
This mule had plowed a hundred thousand rows,  
And pulled a million pounds  
In twenty years of unrequited drudgery  
And aching toil.  
No rhyme or reason in his life,  
And now the end.  
His carcass soon would feel the beak  
Of yonder vulture soaring in the blue.  
He shuddered and a ripple  
Like wind crinkles on a stagnant pool  
Ran through his almost hairless hide.  
Perhaps a fly had bit  
Into that raw place where the hame had rubbed;  
Perhaps (who knows?) he felt  
Strange stirrings in his blood,  
Vague atavistic memories of a day  
Far back in his ancestral stream,  
When Jesus on a lowly ass  
Was hailed triumphantly as king.  
Could he have been thus solaced  
As he dropped upon his buckled knees  
And yielded up the ghost?



## *The Ice-King in the South*

HE came, proud monarch of the Land of Snows,  
Triumphant, in his argent chariot, decked

With jewels mined in regions of the polar zones.  
He came. His fifty snowy steeds were swift  
As howling north winds, and their flowing manes

Were flecked with diamonds brighter than Brazilian  
stones.

He came. To celebrate his triumph, first  
He spread a fleecy mantle o'er the earth—

A frozen shroud symbolic of the Death he wrought.  
And then to every pendent branch he hung  
A glittering sword—the tyrant's right to rule—

Demanding greater homage than ever warrior sought.

More brilliant pageant than the Ice-King's in  
The Land of Flowers, never graced return

Of oriental monarch from victorious wars.  
But oh, beneath the sparkle and the gleam  
Of crystal beauty beats an icy heart,

And a sullen silence his splendid triumph mars:  
The waterfalls that leap from jutting ledge  
In happy song, are speechless as the tomb,

And every melody that haunts the woods and streams  
Has vanished from the earth, and Nature's voice  
That erstwhile woke the matin in the mead  
Is silent now as music of forgotten dreams.

Back to your home in the icy Land of Snows,  
O tyrant czar! No cringing southern heart

Pays honor to your rich magnificence and power.

Back with your splendor and your glistening gems!  
This is the land where every freeman bows  
    But to that Queen alone, whose scepter is the flower.  
Back that our sovereign may usher in  
The reign of Love with sunshine and with song,  
    And drive away the gloom from every southern hearth.  
Back, rude Invader, to Siberian climes!  
And let our royal daughter, Spring, return  
    To fill with happiness and beauty all the earth.

## *Ad Amicos Meos*

LOVE WOULD NOT LET ME GO

I HEARD the boatman singing on the river Styx;  
The night was dark, the stars like dying candlewicks.  
Low tides were softly lapping on some distant sea,  
As Charon turned his prow a straight swift course to me:  
“A host of friends,” he said, “whom I have ferried o’er,  
Tonight are waiting for you on that other shore,  
Eager to greet you and explain so many things  
That you have longed to know—so many questionings.”  
Voices which I had not heard for years, and row  
On row of faces lured me till I wished to go.

Then you came trooping to me with your simple gifts  
Of love and beauty—beauty, riotous in drifts  
Of dahlias, asters, zinnias, cosmos, roses—each  
Perfection’s masterpiece, which only God can reach.  
And now a symphony of color-music I  
Had never heard before filled earth and sea and sky.  
“I will not go.” Surprised the grizzled pilot cried:  
“Repulsed! I leave you then; you have the gods defied.”  
And angrily he wheeled his age-old boat and steered  
For other ports, while you stood on the bank and cheered.



## *Christmas Memory*

I do not know the reason why  
I'm dreaming of an hour gone by,—  
An hour beneath the winter stars.  
Venus had long since sunk from sight,  
And bloodstained Mars  
Would fain  
Have gone to rest  
Beyond the regions of the west.  
The Pleiades had climbed the sky  
And looked like gold mosaics, which some god  
Had wrought upon the dome of night.  
The Bear they call the Lesser Wain  
Was wheeling round the polar star,  
And overhead was Aaron's Rod.

I do not know what constellations are;  
I can't explain my passion for their light;  
Nor do I understand just why,  
When Lyra, half-meridian high,  
Is changing from a silver chrysalis  
Into a gilded butterfly,  
I hear the distant music of guitars;  
But most of all I can not fathom this:  
The aching memory of an hour of bliss  
One olden golden Christmas night  
Beneath the glittering stars.

## *In the Mountains*

I MET a little mountain boy  
As I rode through the vale;  
His tiny sister trailed behind  
With pawpaws in a pail.

I greeted him, "How old are you?"  
He tipped his cap, "I'm six."  
"Where do you live?" He smiled and said,  
"Oh, back there in the sticks."

Then, "Won't you have a pawpaw, Sir?  
We gathered them today."  
I did not like the fruit but said,  
"Why, thank you, if I may."

He held the pail of pawpaws up,  
"My sister, here, is four;  
Her birthday was last week," he said;  
"Sir, won't you have some more?"

A jaybird blew his clarinet,  
A brown thrush tried to trill;  
The lad went whistling down the path,  
As I rode up the hill.

## *Conversion*

A THOUSAND miracles: sunset and dawn,  
The nestlings in the cedar overhead;  
The daffodils new risen from the dead,  
Spring dancing on the lawn,  
And still my unbelief.

October came; her colorings pierced me through.  
"Behold," I cried, "the eye that cannot find  
Divine assurance here is surely blind.  
What more can Nature do?"  
And yet throughout  
It all, I still had doubt.

But when on Christmas morning pitying snows  
Had covered all the festering wounds that mar  
Earth's beauty, and had hidden every scar,  
I said, "That which so clothes  
Even the lowly clod,  
I must believe is God."



## *Kinship*

O H, little children, you who watch the trains go by,  
With yearning faces pressed against the windowpanes,  
You do not know the reason why  
Your lingering image dims my eye  
Though I have passed beyond the hills into the rolling plains.

Dear little children, I once watched the trains go by,  
And hungered much as when I feel the distant stars;  
And then I saw the cold gray skies,  
And felt the warm tears in my eyes,  
When far beyond the rolling hills I heard the rumbling cars.

## *Precocity*

OH, grandfather, what are the stars?  
Stones on the hand of God?  
I heard you call that red one Mars,  
And those three Aaron's Rod;  
And these are great Orion's band."  
"My child, you are too young to understand."

"Oh, grandfather, what are the winds  
That sough and moan and sigh?  
Does God grow angry for men's sins  
He lifts the waves so high?  
And blows his breath o'er sea and land?"  
"My boy, you are too young to understand."

"Oh, grandfather, what are the clouds  
In yonder sunset sky?  
They look to me like winding shrouds  
For men about to die!  
Dear grandfather, your trembling hand!"  
"My son, you are too young to understand."

## *An Autumn Minor*

RUSSET and amber and gold,  
Crimson and yellow and green,  
And far away the blue and gray,  
A twinkling silver sheen.

Violet, scarlet and red,  
Purple and dark maroon,  
And over it all the music of fall—  
A weird, prismatic tune.

An opera serious and grand,  
An orchestra mystic and sad—  
A symphony alone of color and tone  
To drive a mortal mad.



## *A Rondel*

OCTOBER, Queen of autumn days,  
With green and crimsoned leaves is crowned;  
Her russet cheeks are sun-embrowned,  
Her hair all golden in the haze:

She sits upon a throne ablaze,  
Her limbs with royal robes are gowned,—  
October, Queen of autumn days,  
With green and crimson leaves encrowned.

But now o'erwhelmed in sad amaze  
She hears a far-off rising sound;  
The hills and booming seas resound;  
The plaintive wind a requiem plays—  
October, Queen of autumn days.

## *Blind*

A little lad just fresh from God,  
I loved the stars called Aaron's Rod,  
And knew who swung the Pleiades  
Above the earth and over seas.

Sophistication made me blind.  
For forty years I tried to find  
The scientific proof of God,  
While all the time the Seraphim  
Of Beauty were revealing Him  
In gardens where His feet had trod.

## *Dame Sims*

OLD DAME SIMS, who lives in a hut  
By the side of the Great Highway,  
Has skin as brown as a hazelnut,  
And a head like an elder spray.

For many and many a winter cold,  
And many a summer hot,  
This strange old Dame has fortunes told  
In the grounds of her coffee pot.

But she who knows all the knights that ride,  
And the ladies of high degree,  
Still lives in a hut by the Great Road Side  
And fares on a beggar's fee.

Yes, she who knows where the gold is hid  
And the dark-eyed villain's plan,  
Who sees the end of the mystic thrid  
In the life of every man;

Though she could dwell in the king's abode  
On the cliffs by the sounding sea,  
Still lives in a hut by the Great High Road,  
Content with a beggar's fee.



## *Blue Blood*

SHE came from old Virginia, oh, so many years ago.  
When I was just a little lad her hair was white as snow.  
She must have been of royal blood; she talked of kings  
and queens,

Of chivalry and tournaments, of castles and demesnes;  
Of great plantations back at home, of slaves and banquet halls,  
Of powdered wigs and cavaliers, of mansions and of balls;  
Sometimes of blooded horse and hound and women in  
the chase

(Grandmother wore great jewels and a cap of filmy lace).  
She read large tomes of poetry of love and strange romance  
(She said she came of Norman blood that traced clean back  
to France).

She owned a thousand acres of rich rolling bluegrass land,  
A knob of finest timber that the eye has ever scanned.  
She boasted of Kentucky's wealth in minerals and soil  
(And this was many years before we had discovered oil).  
She gloried in her far-flung line of ancient ancestry,—  
Their cattle on a thousand hills in lands beyond the sea.  
We loved dear old grandmother, for she lived in fairy land.  
And sometimes she would tell us how grandfather won  
her hand.

He knew Gladstone at Eton, and had often heard him speak  
(Grandfather was classic shark—read Homer in the Greek).  
And once there was a Greek contest in which he won a prize.  
When grandmother referred to this, she'd all but rhapsodize;  
For grandfather's opponent was the young Lord, Earl  
of Scone,

The next of blood and sometime heir to erstwhile  
Scottish throne,



And I infer that grandfather killed two birds with this  
one stone.

For here grandmother always went and took a volume down,  
Demosthenes, she said it was, in vellum old and brown,  
And smoothed the wrinkled pages out, "And here's the  
precious prize."

And then we'd read the other in grandmother's  
swimming eyes.

But decade after decade passed and other days are here.  
The timber that once crowned the hills is gone this many  
a year;

A billion tons of mineral wealth passed on to foreign marts,  
While grandmother talked ancestors, but overlooked the arts  
And sciences that build the state—the schools  
where wealth is made—

Wealth that abides in character—the schools  
where men are weighed.

In balances that test their worth—where aristocracy  
Is measured, not by titles or some genealogic tree;  
But rather by a cultured life that serves humanity.  
And so while old Kentucky dreamed of ancient pedigrees,  
Her sister states awoke and built their universities,  
Developed their resources and thus left us far behind.  
But grandmother's great grandchildren are now  
no longer blind.

We honor her for what she was; we love her dear old dreams,  
Her castles and plantations and her old ancestral streams.  
To grandmother the setting stars were a religious feast,  
But now we worship toward the sun arising in the east.  
We reverence dear grandmother, her jewels and her lace;  
We love the old daguerreotype that mirrors her sweet face;  
We love her old romances and the book that was the prize,  
But we can't see the world today with dear grandmother's  
eyes.

# *War*

## AN ALLEGORY

I SAT beside a sparkling spring  
One day in early June;  
The mockingbird was practicing  
A brilliant birdland tune.

The crimson-coated cardinal  
Was flashing here and there;  
The soft tones of the bobolinks  
Revealed a happy pair.

An orange-breasted oriole  
Was swinging in her nest;  
The saucy bluejay shouted "See!  
I have a dandy crest."

The sunlight spread about the fields  
And dappled through the trees;  
The fragrance of a day in June  
Was on the morning breeze.

But look! A mighty cavalcade  
Is streaming down the path,  
A host of black Goliath ants—  
Come out of heathen Gath.

A million red Formicidae  
Rush forth to meet the foe;  
They grapple in an awful fight  
Like warriors long ago.



The struggle lasted long until  
Grim Death was conqueror;  
The maimed and wounded strewed the earth—  
Both sides had lost the war.

A flock of dirty sparrows who  
Had kept themselves concealed,  
Swooped down on dead and dying knights  
And cleaned the battlefield.

The mockingbird rehearsed his song  
Till late that afternoon;  
And then there came a plaintive note,—  
The raincrow's deep bassoon.

## *Envy*

"I DO NOT ENVY GOD. . . . HE MUST FACE . . . A VAST  
AND INFINITE MONOTONY."—LOUIS UNTERMAYER

WHY should not poets envy God,  
The creator of Aaron's Rod,  
Orion and the Pleiades,  
Of Venus and the seven seas,  
And autumn's brilliant hills?  
God must have had a billion thrills  
Each eon of eternity.  
He can not face monotony  
Who sees through space a star cloud whirled  
And touches it into a world,  
And throws it like a top that's spun  
And swings it round some ancient sun;  
Who daily sees a planet born,  
And hourly builds a Matterhorn;  
Who takes a microscopic cell  
And makes a mammoth or gazelle,  
A lyrebird or a butterfly,  
A human brain or insect's eye.  
God must find joy in every change  
Of life and form throughout the range  
Of time and space in tree and rose  
And every flowering thing that grows;  
In darning needle's gauzy wing,  
In peacock's rainbow coloring.  
Each moment He makes something new—  
A world or just a drop of dew,  
Which, tangled in the spider's loom,  
Or sparkling on the lily's bloom,

Enchants the eye and stirs the heart  
As can no mortal's finest art.  
What lyric pen could ever write  
A poem like a summer night?  
Or like a flaming maple tree?  
How beautiful the snows can be  
Beneath the dome of winter stars  
When God has hidden all the scars.  
The poet's puny rhymes distill  
A joy that brings the spinal chill.  
Imagine the exquisite shock  
Of creating a hollyhock.  
Why should not Shakespeare envy God  
The authorship of Goldenrod?



## *Gold*

HE made a million on the stock exchange  
And built a mansion, beautiful, supreme—  
In art as perfect as a poet's dream—  
And then he met the debutantes in strange,  
But rich attire; watched dowagers arrange  
Their spider nets; the talk always one theme.

Three winters passed. He took a bride.  
They entertained their world in lavish style  
With balls and feasts, yet all the while  
Paul Payne, somehow was never satisfied.  
He longed for something Gold could not provide—  
Strange discontent he could not reconcile.

The years passed by. He made a million more.  
He owned a yacht and Lincoln Limousine.  
His chauffeur wore a coat of velveteen  
A butler stood in livery at the door.  
An oriental rug on every floor,  
And landscapes tapestried in gold and green.

His art room had an early Claude Lorrain,  
A Fragonard, two pieces by Watteau;  
A Hobbema; a spring scene by Corot;  
A Martin landscape called a Country Lane;  
A Winslow Homer, On the Coast of Maine,  
An unknown masterpiece, New England Snow.

These landscapes seemed in part to satisfy  
The vague but aching cravings of his heart.  
In boyhood trees and streams had been a part

Of all he knew and loved. He had an eye  
For clouds that stain and gild the sunset sky;  
But now he had to be content with art.

One day he saw a rustic plowing corn,  
And asked the countryman how much he made.  
"Not much," said he. "It's hard to make the grade.  
I own a Winchester, a good fox horn,  
A Sunday suit another man has worn;  
I have this horse, a scythe, a mowing blade;

"A maul and wedge, a yoke of steers and sled.  
We have some geese; we raise our garden truck,  
And watermelons when we have good luck.  
We have not suffered much for meat and bread.  
Last week my woman picked a feather bed,  
But that same day we lost our finest duck."

"Are you contented, then, with what you make?"

"Well no, I'm not. I really wish that I  
Could go to town next Saturday and buy  
My wife, Jo Ann, a dress and garden rake.  
You should have seen the birthday cake  
She made me last December on the sly.

"We have two girls who go to district school  
From August till it's fodder-pulling time;  
Our baby's big enough to crawl and climb.  
He loves to watch a kitten roll a spool.  
John Robert does odd jobs for Sam Claypool,  
And sometimes makes a nickle or a dime.

"And Jo Ann sold two dozen eggs today.  
She needs a pair of shoes; but if the moon



Is out tonight, I mean to catch a coon,  
And that will bring six bits. Ten coons will pay  
The balance that I owe Jim Watts for hay,  
I bought of him a year ago in June.

"But pardner, I do not complain although  
A little cash would help a lot just now,  
Last fall I had to kill my old brood sow,  
When we were out of meat. The overflow  
Of Redbird when the rains took out the snow  
Last April, drown-ded our old Muley cow.

"But hush! that songster's singing now in flight!  
Do you have mockingbirds in town? I ache  
Sometimes from heavy work, still would not take  
A hundred for my birds. Of course you're right,  
I do need many things, but in the night  
That mocker sings whenever I'm awake.

"The jonquils, too, are pretty in the spring,  
And dandelions thick as butterflies;  
And banks of scarlet clouds in sunset skies.  
In summer field larks make the meadows ring;  
And every evening swifts are on the wing.  
I may be just a fool in city eyes.

"But what can take the place of honey bees  
At dinner in a clover dining room?  
What odor sweet as that of lilac bloom  
That floats upon the early morning breeze?  
Or scent that comes from blooming apple trees?  
What sight is prettier than a sumac plume?



"I know I'm poor, but there are many things  
To make me happy. Nature does her best.  
She brings me beauty, food and sleep and rest;  
And always in the summer evenings  
We sit out in the cool and Jo Ann sings,  
While some bright star is twinkling in the west."

That night Paul Payne walked up and down till three.  
His youth came back to him: The magic gleam  
Of golden sunlight on a silver stream;  
A bluebird calling from a willow tree;  
A million disks upon the lea,—  
The innocence and beauty of a dream.



## *Bluebirds*

ONLY a very little thing,  
But a lump is in my throat.  
A brilliant day in early spring  
We heard the Bluebird's note,  
Calling his bride, persistent, strong,  
Till she flashed to his side.

So many years and each one long,  
Since Nancy Withers died.

I've tried them all, oh, everything—  
There is no antidote.  
Only a glimpse of a bluebird's wing,  
And a lump is in my throat.

## *The Cardinal*

KENTUCKY'S STATE BIRD

ANIMATED flashing flame of scarlet,  
Teasing, tantalizing, madcap varlet,  
Glooming, glinting through the boughs,  
Making, breaking lover's vows;  
Dashing leader of the choir,  
Standing on the topmost spire  
Scintillating song and fire,

    Calls me: *Come up, come up,*  
    Higher, higher, higher.

Daytime meteor trailing light,  
Like a shooting star at night,  
Just a moment of delight,  
Followed by a mad desire.

But the flaming flash of scarlet,  
Teasing, tantalizing, madcap varlet,  
Hiding from my aching sight,—  
This time just a little nigher,  
Laughing from his leafy height,

    Mocks me: *Come up, come up,*  
    Higher, higher, higher.



## *To the Mockingbird*

WHENCE is your song?  
Voluptuous soul of the amorous South!  
Oh, whence the wind? the rain? the drouth?  
The dews of eve? the mists of morn?  
The bloom of rose? the thistle's thorn?  
Whence light of love? Whence dark of scorn?  
Whence joy? Whence grief? Death born of wrong?  
Ah, whence is Life, ten thousand passions throng?  
*Thence* is your song!

You sing the rage of jealous Moor,  
The passionate love of Juliet;  
Your villainous art can weave a net  
With shreds of song that never yet  
Has lover escaped, however noble and pure;  
Ophelia's broken heart is yours,  
And Desdemona's, true and good;  
You paint the damn-ed spot of blood  
That will not out with any cures.  
O Lear, O Fool, O Witch, Macbeth,  
And wondrous Hamlet in a breath!  
Who knows your heart, your song, your words?  
Great Shakespeare in the realm of birds!

## *Bluebird*

BLUEBIRD in the cedar bush—  
Fresh and clean as the evergreen,  
Through a rift of leaves,  
Or my eye deceives.  
But silent! Hush!  
He calls, he calls!  
The first spring note  
From a feathered throat  
My heart enthralls;  
And my pulses leap  
As a child from sleep  
On Christmas morn, at the blast of horn,  
To meet, to greet,  
The choral sweet  
From bluebird in the cedar bush:  
*At last, at last*  
*The snow and sleet*  
*Of winter's blast*  
*Have passed, have passed;*  
*And spring is here, good cheer, good cheer!*  
The call comes ringing in to me  
From Bluebird in the cedar tree.

## *Little Jack*

WHEN Mother bobbed her hair,  
Dad didn't really swear  
As everybody thought he would;  
But he was in an awful mood  
And sat around and sulked and sulked  
And finally went to bed without a bite to eat.  
Sister cried at first  
And then got mean as sin and skulked  
Around behind a chair  
And made a mouth at mother's hair;  
But even this was not the worst:  
She said a word I won't repeat.  
Old Buffalo, our Saint Bernard  
Who lay before the fire,  
As though to show his canine ire  
Got up and shook his hide  
And stalked out into the yard  
And raised a dismal howl.  
That ancient pessimist, the owl,  
Replied:  
"Tu-hoo, tu-hoo, tu-hoo,"  
Till mother dropped upon her knees and cried.  
And then I knew  
That we had erred  
And saw we all had been absurd.  
But Jack, our keen-eyed wise canary,—  
Blessed little godlike faery,  
Hopped upon his singing perch  
And looked askance as though in search  
Of what had caused the gloom.



He took the situation in,  
And threw a glance at Mother's hair  
As she was kneeling there in prayer,  
And though I thought I saw him blink,  
He did not seem at all to think  
She had committed sin.  
Instead, he preened one yellow wing  
And fluttered out a tiny thing,  
A little golden plume,  
And then began to sing.  
Indignant at the poignant wrong  
With vibrant darts and shafts of song  
He shot the darkness from the room.  
I looked at Mother kneeling there  
And saw a halo on her hair  
Of love and sacrifice;  
And while I gazed I heard a sound,  
And quickly turned and looked around,  
And Dad was standing on the stair:  
"Forgive me, dear, I did not mean  
To be so rude, and now declare  
I'm really glad you bobbed your hair;  
There's not a head with such a sheen  
This side of Paradise."  
Then little Jack took one more peep,  
And cuddled up and went to sleep.

## *The Passing of Thor*

THE Teuton Mars—mad thundering Thor—  
His banner now forever furled,  
Has passed, as did the Dinosaur,  
Who ruled the prehistoric world.

Our young America, inspired  
By hate of ruthless, unjust War,  
In noble wrath arose and fired  
The shot that slew the Minotaur.

Peace-loving, but of valiant mind,  
Though faced by most tremendous odds,  
We fought for Truth and all Mankind—  
A Moral Cause against false gods—

Gods who corrupted Germany,  
Scorned Goethe's Faust and Schiller's Tell,  
Made light of German symphony,  
And plunged her downward into Hell.

Now we dare hope War never again  
Will scourge the world in after time;  
That Peace on Earth, Good Will toward Men  
Shall be a never-ending Rhyme.

## *Renaissance*

No more shall War enslave the earth.  
A banner is at last unfurled  
That symbolizes a new birth  
Of Liberty throughout the world.

An awful struggle—hard and long—  
The cost a million precious youth.  
What Bard could celebrate in song  
This final Victory of Truth?

For even prostrate Germany,  
Despite war-tragic madness, when  
Restored to normal sanity,  
May rise and be herself again.

Another Schubert may be born,  
And fill the earth with melody;  
Some Beethoven another morn  
May write a great world symphony.

And Germany's creative mind,  
Submerged in sin and savagery,  
Renascent may enrich mankind  
In Science and Philosophy.



## *Cosmic Light*

WHAT profits us that we explore the moon  
By radar, rocket, or on magic wing?  
The moon is dead—on it no living thing.  
Our hope is more abundant life, and soon.

The Nations now confront a dangerous hour,  
And something more than diplomatic art  
Is needed, something that will change the heart—  
A spirit-chemistry of cleansing power.

Vibrations of the questing soul can reach  
Beyond the moon, the sun, the milky way,  
Contact the source of life and cosmic day,  
And get return in universal speech.

And when the UNO in honest sooth  
And humble attitude shall search for light,  
The Star the Magi saw that olden night  
Will point the goal and lead them to the Truth.

## *Things Beautiful*

A CLOUD on fire as the sun goes down;  
Twinkling gold in the midnight sky;  
A flock of wild geese honking high;  
A bluebird in a brand new gown.

Moonlight drenching a silver sleet;  
Robins astir at the burst of dawn;

Shadows that dapple a butterfly lawn;  
Ripples at play in a field of wheat.

Ironweeds purpling in the sun;  
A pine knob limned against the sky;  
The lonely night bird's mourningful cry;  
Homing kine when the day is done.

A redbird at her morning bath;  
Hollyhocks round a humble home;  
Liquid gold in the honeycomb;  
A love song and its aftermath.

An old black mammy's plaintive croon  
That soothes her little babe to sleep;  
A hillside sown with feeding sheep;  
Corn knee-high in early June.

Oh, everything the eye looks on  
And every sound the ear takes in;  
The tinkling of a mandolin,  
A rugged oak or a floating swan.

Beauty's the chiefest muse of art,  
Keats knew this and so did Poe;  
Lanier and Schubert and Jean Corot,  
And each wooed Beauty and won her heart.

# *Goldenrod*

KENTUCKY'S STATE FLOWER: A SONG

IN the Mountains of Kentucky  
Where the ivy's astral spray,  
And the laurel's waxen petals  
Make a mundane Milky Way;  
Where the purple rhododendron  
And the wild forget-me-nots  
Bloom in amorous profusion  
Round a thousand ferny grotts;  
Here the streams are swift and sparkling  
And the thrushes always gay,  
And the redbirds glint and glimmer  
Through the longest summer day;  
But the glory of Kentucky  
Is where Beauty's feet have trod  
In the brilliant fields of autumn,  
Crowned with flaming Goldenrod.

## C H O R U S

Beauty is a sprite,  
And like a beam of light,  
She dances over mountains  
And on velvet bluegrass sod;  
But when the summer's over,  
And the bees have left the clover,  
She turns her fairy slippers  
Into flames of Goldenrod.

In the Bluegrass of Kentucky,  
Men are brave but never bold,



And our hundred thousand Colonels  
Are like gallant knights of old;  
Here we breed the fastest horses;  
Finer cattle never grew,  
And our women are the fairest  
That a mortal ever knew.  
These are things in Old Kentucky  
That our State is noted for;  
Also Bourbon and Light Burley,  
And immortal Man o' War.  
But to eyes that look on Nature,  
Here the greatest gift of God,  
Are our brilliant fields in Autumn,  
Crowned with flaming Goldenrod.

## *Vision*

HE knelt beside a little grave,  
Marked by a rude headstone,  
And tried to read the epitaph,  
Now weathered and moss-grown.

He was a poor thin palsied thing,  
Now kithless, but earth-bound,  
Except for her who lay beneath  
That ivy-covered mound.

"I wandered here to read once more  
These graven words of mine,  
I chiseled on this stone, but now  
I can't make out a line.

"The letters seem all blurred today.  
Can it be tear-dimmed eyes?  
The sun must be already down—  
It may be darkened skies.

"But I can see Jean's golden curls  
And pretty little hat,  
And her new gingham Sunday dress,  
And I thank God for that."

The old man rose and turned away,  
And tottered toward the town.  
Who knows but Jean walked by his side,  
In her new gingham gown.

## *To a Caged Canary*

LITTLE poet, in your cage,  
Whence this rapt religious rage?  
Are you living in the past,  
Worshipful enthusiast,  
Dreaming of ancestral days?  
How have you the heart to praise  
God in such a shower of prayer,  
Scattering song pearls everywhere?  
It has been three hundred years  
Since those brutal buccaneers  
Sold you for the lust of gold.  
Has your heart not yet grown cold?  
Happy reincarnate soul,  
Have you not one note of dole?  
Only praise and joy of song?  
Naught of all the hurt and wrong?  
Little bird, does it suffice  
That you once knew paradise?



## *Santa Claus*

I MET a jolly chap today  
As I came down the Great Highway.  
He had a pack upon his back  
That almost blocked the road.  
Yet on he strode beneath his load,  
Singing a roundelay.  
“Aha,” I mused, “some peddler, he,  
I wonder what his wares can be.”  
As though he read my thoughts he stopped,  
Left off his song, and dropped  
His pack, and thus saluted me:  
“Now let us see,” he said, said he,  
“If you remember me.”  
His beard was like the polar snow,  
His checks were ruddy as the glow  
Of sunset in a winter sky.  
At first I knew not what to say.  
I looked him sometime in the face,  
I looked him in the eye,  
Until there came the faintest trace,  
And then the perfect memory  
Of fifty years ago that day.  
An old man and a tiny boy,  
A tin horn and unbounded joy!  
But still it was beyond my ken  
That he seemed younger now than then  
By half a century.  
“Your secret, Santa Claus,” cried I,  
“How do you Father Time defy?”  
He laughed outright, “The Simple Art

Of keeping Christmas in the Heart.”  
A year had passed. On Christmas Day  
As I came down the Great Highway,  
I met Old Santa with a pack  
That would have broke a giant’s back.  
Yet on he strode beneath his load,  
Singing his roundelay.  
Now I declare I think his hair  
Was whiter than a polar bear,  
And yet his voice and what he sung  
Were proof that Santa Claus was young.  
I hailed him, “I demand the truth,—  
Your secret of eternal youth.”  
“I told you once—the simple art  
Of keeping Christmas in the Heart.”  
“But Santa Claus, will you explain  
Just how I can that art attain?”  
“By trusting much to faith and love,  
Believing where you cannot prove;  
By giving more than you receive,  
And claiming less than you achieve;  
Forgiving base ingratitude,  
The insult and the angry mood,  
Forgetting all the hurt and wrong.”  
And then he raised his blithesome song  
And started on beneath his load  
Of gifts that almost blocked the road.  
“Dear Santa Claus,” I cried, “but how—  
How can one practice such an art?”  
His mellow voice was trembling now,  
“By keeping Christmas in the Heart.”



## *The Soldier's Delirium*

IN A RED CROSS CAMP NEAR VERDUN, 1917

THE surgeon tells me I am dying—  
The rods were grimy and I didn't see the crack,—  
I mean the rods where I was lying . . .  
That wheel was hot that ran across my back.

But never mind! It's over now—  
The sun has gone to rest behind the wooded hill . . .  
No moon, it's dark about the prow;  
But stars are shining and the wind is still. . . .

Why yes, I've been upon the sea,—  
Six years a common salt, and four as second mate,  
But that was long ago—to me—  
A hundred years, if I can calculate.

But look! The east is growing red. . . .  
This car will stop before we reach the water tank . . .  
A cop! I'm pinched by George—My head! . . .  
It hit the rail— . . . upon the German flank.

My grandsire? War incarnate! Yes,  
The sheen of Mars upon Apollo's brow—  
The Battle of the Wilderness—  
At Bull Run and at Five Forks, too,—oh, how

Could she disdain my love? Release  
Me? Why a soldier's daughter could not understand  
My dream of universal peace,  
Still less the insane love that sought her hand.



I thought the ocean breeze would cool  
My blood, the salt wave wash the memory from my heart.  
Ten years, and I was still a fool— . . .  
In England, Spain, and Oriental mart.

I took to rum and hit the rail;  
For twelve years rode the rods from Frisco to the Keys— . . .  
A knight who sought the Holy Grail,—  
A hobo drinking failure to the lees.

But that is past and gone, and she—  
Well, she will never know the tramp that saved her child  
From death and lost his arm was he  
Her cruel words drove mad. But oh, she smiled,—

The little girl, and that was worth  
Two fruitless arms that never felt the thrill  
Of honest toil on God's green earth— . . .  
It burst where I was fighting on the hill. . . .

A pilgrim of the rails won't fight?—  
His blood who led the charge up Cemetery Ridge!  
Because I dreamed democracy . . . Tonight—  
Some day she'll know. . . . That cut . . . beyond the bridge!

I have atoned—atoned—Thank God!  
They would not take me—I had lost a worthless hand! . . .  
A Pickett just a common clod!  
They didn't know,—they couldn't understand.

I stoked my way across the sea  
And landed late in March. . . . The battle of the Aisne—  
The Marne—Verdun—the jubilee  
Of Death!—the stifling gas—the shrieks of pain— . . .



At Gettysburg . . . the Wilderness— . . .  
The dashing charge—his matchless name redeemed,  
redeemed . . . !  
This car is getting cold— . . . Why yes,  
It would have struck her.—But her hair! It gleamed

Like shredded gold. . . . Please close the blind,  
For light has flooded all the room. . . . Her smile was God!  
There, nurse, don't cry! don't—never mind!  
Her hair! . . . Your hair! My little Goldenrod!

## *Poets in Heaven*

I do not crave a poet's name;  
Nor have I ever longed for fame;  
But when I'm gone if I can know  
My verse has made some hearts to glow  
With love for worthy humble folk  
Who daily toil, yet wear the yoke  
Of poverty, I'm sure that I  
Shall be content beyond the sky.

I wonder if Jim Riley knows  
We love him more than many of those  
Whose brilliant deeds won wide acclaim,  
And placed their busts in Halls of Fame.  
Jim has his niche in every heart  
That knows the poet's magic art  
Of transmuting a commonplace  
Crude earthen jar into a vase,  
And lifting poor "consumpted" Jim  
To level with the seraphim;  
Or finding harelip Joney had  
The courage of a super lad.  
I do not know what poets know  
In realms of light where poets go,  
But if they still can understand,  
Who live up there in Wonderland,  
I doubt that even Tennyson  
For all of his great poetry,  
As he looks back, can happier be  
Than Riley for the homely themes  
That filtered through his earthly dreams.



# *What Might Have Been*

A SOLILOQUY

THE lights were glowing in the City Hall.  
An eager public throng had gathered there  
To listen to my voice that could enthrall  
Even the dullest ear of Laissez-faire.

For I was then a brilliant orator.  
Though handicapped in youth by poverty,  
I fought the dragons in their ruthless war  
To crush the living truth that sets men free.

I fought and won; and here were rich and poor,—  
The man of toil, the fairest of the town;  
Some from the hills; illiterate, obscure;  
Some famous, learned and of wide renown.

And she was there! My tongue a coal of fire;  
The audience was swayed as trees by wind;  
I played upon them as they were a lyre  
I smote with fingers strong, but disciplined.

The very stars seemed to foretell my fate:  
Success and fame within my easy grasp—  
The goal the governorship of our great state.  
Remembrance stings me like a poison asp.

I met defeat and lost the will to fight;  
I squandered wealth,—forgot I was well-born.  
I'm nothing but a vagabond tonight,  
Deserving man's contempt and utter scorn.

God, must I breathe this foul air to the end,—  
The smoke and fumes of underworld black damp,  
That stifles every prayer that would ascend  
And brands me outcast and a worthless tramp?

I could endure starvation, cold and pain,  
And cankering remorse for my great sin,  
If I could blot forever from my brain  
The haunting Vision of What Might Have Been.

### *Sunset in Breathitt*

THROUGH purple haze of evening mountain mist,  
A spiral thread of dark blue smoke arose  
From hidden cove and rugged steep defile;  
While like a ball of blood o'er some far distant isle,  
The sun a moment hung in deep repose,  
Above a placid sea of amethyst,  
In mystic prophecy of death and doom—  
Then dropped and splashed the sky with crimson spray  
and spume.





*IV*

*GRANDMOTHER DAYS*



## *Grandmother Days*

My Grandmother Young was wrinkled and old  
When she sat by the mantelpiece;  
And she wore a cap with many a fold  
Of ribbon and lace, as rich as gold,  
And worked in many a crease:  
And the billowy clouds of smoke that rolled  
From her little stone pipe whenever she told  
Of the quest of the Golden Fleece,  
Wrought me to think that Grandmother Young  
Was shriveled and gray when Homer sung  
Of the gods of ancient Greece.

But all of her marvelous mythical lore  
Was naught to her magical power—  
Transforming a house with a puncheon floor  
To a palace of wealth with a golden door  
That led to a castle tower—  
An attic loft with a wonderful store  
Of things that we feared, but longed to explore—  
Our grandmother's ancient dower.  
Oh, grandmother's charm could change but a base  
Rude vessel of clay to a Haviland vase,  
A weed to a royal flower.

And grandmother's home was a temple of grace  
And my child heart worshipped there,  
When Balm-of-Gilead around the place,  
Like incense, for a mile of space,  
Perfumed the glorious air;  
And the song that came from the feathered race



In the boughs of the tangled interlace  
Of apple and peach and pear,  
Enthralled me like the magic spell  
Of siren music when it fell  
On old Ulysses' ear.

Last summer I passed where the palace once stood  
Whose beauty my life beguiled;  
It's a cabin now; and the charm-ed wood  
Of sugar and oak, in brotherhood  
Of walnut and hickory, aisled  
For gathering nuts and the merry mood  
That only our childhood understood,  
By man has been defiled.  
Oh, how can I ever cease to praise  
The fairy enchantment of grandmother days  
When I was a little child!

## *The Old Old Clock*

DEAR old Old Clock, thy grave ticktock  
I heard in my childhood days,  
In the solemn night, when the fire burned bright,  
And the lamp cast feeble rays;  
When grandmother close by the mantelpiece,  
Sat dozing or knitting, or carding fleece,  
Or watching the dying blaze;  
When mother was young and her beautiful hair  
Had never a silver thread;  
When her life was fair as her love was rare,  
In the years that have swiftly sped.

Thy grave ticktock, dear old Old Clock,  
Unchanged through the changing years,  
Still beating time in a ceaseless rhyme  
To the dirge of the rolling spheres,—  
Unmindful that she by the mantelpiece  
Is gone with her knitting and carding fleece,—  
Unmoved by our sorrowing tears—  
Brings back the days when mother's hair  
Had never a silver thread,  
And the life still fair in its beauty rare  
When the snows had crowned her head.



## *The Old-Fashioned Loom*

THE old log house where Margaret lived whose roof  
    had mossy grown,  
Reposed amid its clump of trees—a queen upon her throne.  
The Woodlands rang with feathered song, the meadows were  
    abloom,  
When Margaret plied the shuttles of the rude old-fashioned  
    loom.

The world has grown fastidious now and laughs at rustic ways,  
As crude and unesthetic, and scorns the oxcart days;  
But bees then found their nectar in a common clover bloom,  
And simple hearts heard music in the shuttle of the loom.

The picture that my memory paints is never seen today—  
The April sun of bygone years has lost its brightest ray—  
A fancy wrought piano in a quaint, antique old room,  
But Margaret sang her sweetest to the music of the loom.

She wore a simple homespun dress, for Margaret's taste  
    was plain,  
But life became to her a song with work a sweet refrain.  
The sunshine filled her days with joy, night's shadows  
    brought no gloom,  
When Margaret plied the shuttles of the old old-fashioned  
    loom.

Her warp of life was toiling and unchanging love its woof—  
The web she wove a character beyond the world's reproof;  
She did not live in luxury nor dress in rich costume,  
But oh, the songs that Margaret sang to her old-fashioned  
    loom.



# *The Old Water Mill*

## GRANDFATHER'S MONOLOGUE

'T WAS grinding day at the Old Water Mill,  
But holiday with me,  
For I knew ere I reached the foot of the hill  
And heard the voice of the happy rill,  
The miller's beautiful child was there  
That wore the tresses of sunlit hair  
And smile of witchery;  
And the twittering swallows awhirl in the air,  
Told in their ecstasy  
That Rachel, the Golden Daffodil,  
Was blooming again by the Old Water Mill.

Together we cross the moss-covered log  
That spans the old millrace,  
And we hear through the mists and rising fog  
The boom of the dam, the croak of the frog,  
That wakes, on the banks of the glinting stream,  
The violet tranced in her winter dream,  
Where lights and shadows lace;  
And the cowslip, like the meteor's gleam,  
Darts from her hiding place,  
While the cataracts leap in their haste to fill  
The floats of the wheel at the Old Water Mill.

We sit by the dam of the placid stream  
And watch the whirl and churn  
Of the pouring floods that bubble and steam  
And glitter and flash in the bright sunbeam,  
While steadily rolls the dripping wheel

That slowly grinds the farmers' meal,  
Who restless wait their turn;  
But the lights in the miller's face reveal  
Never the least concern,  
Who takes his toll, and whistles until  
The hopper is drained at the Old Water Mill.

Today we passed where the Old Water Mill  
Had stood in the long ago,  
But the cataracts leap no more on the hill,  
And the boom of the roaring dam is still,  
For the gleaming stream in its grief went dry,  
When the ruthless hand of Art passed by  
And laid the Old Mill low;  
And the violets, cold in death, now lie  
Wrapped in the glistening snow;  
And the biting air is crisp and chill  
Around the ruins of the Old Water Mill

And now we sit by the River of Time  
And gaze at the waves below,  
But its brink is covered by frost and rime,  
And we hear on the wind a muffled chime  
Proclaiming the end of a brief sojourn:  
Yet the floods of life still whirl and churn  
As the currents ebb and flow:—  
By the rolling wheel we wait our turn  
Calm, but ready to go!  
The hopper is drained, but unmoved still,  
The Miller who grinds in Time's Water Mill.



## *Waterloo*

A MEETINGHOUSE, no church at all,  
With stained cathedral glass,  
With lofty spire and arching hall,  
And terraced lawns of grass;  
No organ peals, no chanting choir,  
No frescoed walls that men admire  
Had this old meetinghouse;  
But roses wild their petals piled  
About its sacred door,  
And locust bloom shed rich perfume,  
Upon the air, galore,  
Around the meetinghouse.

It stood upon a limpid stream  
My childhood thought divine,  
Whose waters pure did ever gleam  
Like shimmering shine of wine;  
It stood, alas! but stands no more  
Upon the bank or pebbly shore  
Of sunny Pleasant Run;  
Yet in my dreams, it often seems  
I see thee, Waterloo,  
And see the flash of beaded splash  
Upon the waters too,  
While crossing Pleasant Run.

Yes, in my dreams, I often hear  
The songs they used to sing—  
Those solemn lays of reverent fear,  
When Christ indeed was King;  
Then sinners bowed when prayer was led



By some poor saint the ravens fed  
At holy Waterloo  
How free from lust, the simple trust  
Of soul that worshipped there;  
How free from guile were men erstwhile  
Whose creed was song and prayer,  
The creed of Waterloo.

The meeting days were always fair—  
God smiled on Waterloo!  
And mother rode the dark brown mare,  
And took the mule colt, too;  
For fashion then did not beguile  
A mother's heart with worldly wile,  
Ah! happy days ago!  
Oh! days no more when mothers wore  
Sunhood and riding skirt,  
And fathers dressed their Sunday best,  
A plain check cotton shirt,—  
Ah! happy days ago!

The sunlight dances on the hills  
That shelter Waterloo;  
I see the gold of daffodils  
That bloom the meadow through—  
The hour has come, for meeting's broke,  
And now the simple country folk  
Are leaving Waterloo!  
The horses neigh; away, away!  
Away, but not for home;  
Grandma today will laugh and say,  
"My boy, my boy has come."  
Oh, blessed Waterloo!

## *The Old Spinning Wheel*

A CABIN! It nestled amid the green hills  
Where grew no bramble or thistle,—  
Mid meadows melodious with music and trills  
And song that the wild-throated mockingbird spills  
On the air from his marvelous whistle.  
No carpet or rugs on the clean shining floor,  
No paintings of classic appeal,  
But a statue was there that Art cannot know,  
That filled the rude room with a musical glow,—  
'Twas Ruth at the Old Spinning Wheel!

Long years have passed by; its music was stilled  
As rattle and whirr of machinery.  
And the peafowl now screams where the mockingbird trilled,  
And the landscape is dead where once the heart thrilled  
At wildwood and picturesque scenery.  
The opera may boast the diva of song,  
To me she makes no appeal;  
To flute obligato my heart is still dumb,  
But oh! for the song and musical hum  
Of Ruth and the Old Spinning Wheel!

She lived but a simple, plain rustic life,  
Yet charming in sooth was her beauty.  
In her untutored heart was love ever rife,  
The seat of no conflict, no struggle or strife  
'Twixt a selfish will and duty.  
I bow at her altar of beauty and truth,  
At the shrine of her heart do I kneel,  
With a prayer no mortal ever lifted above,



Till my soul is atune with the music of love  
She sings to the Old Spinning Wheel!

This unlettered maiden was poor, but highbred,  
Oh, women of fashion far above you!  
And I thrilled at the graceful poise of her head  
And the radiant smile of my love when she said,  
“Why, James, you know that I love you.”  
Nymphlike her lithe form swayed as in dance,  
I awkwardly sat at the reel—  
A moment’s surcease of monotonous thrum,—  
Melodious the lull in the song and the hum  
Of Ruth and the Old Spinning Wheel.

The glow of the incandescent light  
Has banished the tallow candle;  
And the oxcart is gone at steam’s rapid flight,  
But Love is too subtle, is too recondite  
For Learning or Genius to handle.  
All honor to Science, let her keep her mad pace,  
I abate not a tittle her zeal;  
But the splendors of life can never efface  
The picture of Ruth in plain rustic grace  
Who wrought at the Old Spinning Wheel!



## *Dog-Iron Days*

THE old Old Dog-Irons! How that picture stirs my soul,  
As I rake the ashes of the past and find that living coal;  
When I blow the breath of memory it flashes into flame,  
Revealing scenes of other days dearer than wealth or fame.  
Would you like to hear the story of my early childhood days,  
When I read the mystic symbols in the embers and the blaze  
Of the old wide-open fireplace, where the backlog all aglow  
With its shifting scenes of fancy was a motion picture show?  
I know about your natural gas, your stoves and anthracite,  
Your phonograph and telephone and incandescent light;  
I've heard about the luxury of cars and gasoline,  
And the value to the modern school of pictures on the screen;  
Of the marvels of the airplane and the wonders of the press,  
And the blessings of the wireless when a ship is in distress.  
I bow to great invention with its all but magic art,  
But the things that make for happiness concern the human  
heart.

Then why not praise the tallow dip, the dog-irons and the  
crane,

The kettle singing on the coals, or hanging to a chain?  
The children gathered round the hearth to hear of early  
days—

The wildcat and the panther and the redman's sneaking ways,  
The bravery of our fathers and the scalping knife and gun,  
The courage of our women folks! I tell you, Sir, 'twas fun.  
We roasted sweet potatoes and we talked of Marion's men,  
How they routed all the Redcoats, or slew them in the fen.  
We learned to love our country and we swore to tell the truth,  
And do no deed of treachery, and never act uncouth;  
To guard the honor of our name, and shield a virtuous home,

To read the Proverbs and the Psalms and love the sacred  
Tome.

I know our home was humble then,—rag carpet on the floor,  
But the stranger found a welcome there—the latchstring  
on the door;

The well sweep and the woodpile and the ox team in the shed,  
Dried apples hung around the walls, and pumpkins  
overhead—

Not sanitary, I'll admit, nor stylish-like, nor rich,  
But health and comfort and content; now tell me which  
is which?

Then who can blame me if I love the good old Dog-Iron Days,  
When men had hearts and character that fortune  
couldn't faze.

The years before the modern skirts and Camel cigarettes,  
When women wove their linsey clothes instead of—  
devilish nets;

When children did the chores at night, nor ever heard of Gym,  
Or movements such as boy scouts, yet kept in health and trim.  
We spent our evenings then at home and read and sang  
and played

And talked of work and feats of strength, and what our crops  
had made;

And when we mentioned quilting bees and apple-peeling time,  
We had in mind our sweethearts, and we sometimes  
made a rhyme.

'Twas then I read my future in the embers and the blaze,  
And this is why I praise today the good old dog-iron ways.



## *The Old Drinking Gourd*

A DEEP alcove where clambering vine  
    Enfashioned wreathes of green festoon,  
    Where through the long, long afternoon  
No ray of summer's sultry shine  
    E'er kissed the rustic grapevine swing:  
High up the purpling muscadine  
Clung close to where the waters poured,  
    And he saw the glint of the redbird's wing  
    In the crystal wave of the mossy spring,  
As she stooped for the Old Drinking Gourd.

The odor tint of elder bloom  
    The zephyrs wafted through the spray  
    Was fresh as dew at dawn of day,  
Caught in the geometric loom,  
    Arachne plies with subtle hand:  
A pigeon bathed his snowy plume,  
A fading speck the vulture soared;  
    And a tide swept in across the sand  
    As they stood on the brink of the golden strand  
And drank from the Old Drinking Gourd.

\* \* \*

A palace wrought of art sublime  
    Where antique paintings haunt the walls,  
    And gilded foot as silent falls  
In depths of plush, as flight of time,  
    And liquid music softer blows  
Than Hymen's mellow golden chime:



They plighted troth beneath the sword  
Of the knight that wore the blood red rose;  
But they drank of the cup that never flows  
From the bowl of the Old Drinking Gourd.

Now sunset spills his scarlet dyes  
Through fleecy rifts of snowy cloud,  
And night puts on her ebon shroud,  
And stars look out of wintry skies:  
Still spacious halls with revels ring  
Where chivalry with beauty vies,  
And red wine flows at festive board.  
But oh! for the cove where the redbirds sing  
By the crystal wave of the mossy spring,  
And a draught from the Old Drinking Gourd.







## *Thomas P. Cooper*

YOU saw a million farmers squeeze the soil  
And each year take diminishing returns;  
You watched a million women at their churns  
Get little butter for their weary toil,  
And said: "Science shall lift this heavy load  
From many thousands—slaves of drudgery—  
Drive superstition out and set them free,  
Retune the dullest birdland's summer ode."

The Farm is Alma Mater to the world.  
Her bounteous breasts supply the nourishment  
Of life to all mankind—benevolent  
And gracious Mother. Knowledge, yet unfurled,  
May some day make her bosom yield tenfold  
What she was wont to give us as of old.



*James Lane Allen*

THE breath of hemp and rasp of golden maize,  
The fresh cool sweetness of the April dawn,  
The pale-green sunset and the rose-decked lawn,  
Glad skies of June and autumn's mystic haze;  
The sough of winter winds through leafless days,  
The green once more when all the snows have gone,  
The rainbow—which no art has ever drawn—  
That spans the sky where holy lovers gaze;

All these he saw and loved and understood:  
The haughty redbird's sacerdotal dress,  
The shrinking bluebird's unfeigned bashfulness,  
The warbler, hermit of the bushy wood.  
He is the poet, lover, seer and priest  
Of earth and sky, of man and bird and beast.



## *Madison Cawein*

I SAW him standing with his ear atilt  
As if he heard strange music in the wood—  
Some concert by his fairy brotherhood—  
Or drops of song by spirit-redbird spilt  
Where southwinds tossed them till he felt the lilt  
Of love that pulsed in rhythm through his blood;  
And then I knew my poet understood  
Where dryads made their home and songbirds built.

And I have learned who schooled him in the tongue  
Of elfland, wood, and naiad stream,  
Inspired and then interpreted his dream,  
And taught him all the songs that he has sung:  
'Twas she no mortal eye did ever scan,  
But his,—the daughter of the wood god Pan.

## *Helen Keller*

SHE never sees the sun transmute to gold  
A cauldron of volcanic cumuli;  
She never looks upon star-studded sky  
When snows are deep and moonless nights are cold;  
She never hears the bleat of waking fold,  
The grackle chattering or the kildees cry,  
As day bursts like a golden butterfly,  
The black cocoon in which it has been rolled.

But she has found the dial of the brain  
That draws the music from the rolling spheres  
And fills the silent darkness of the years  
With television, eyes have sought in vain,—  
With song beyond the voice of any bird,  
With symphonies Beethoven never heard.



## *Chant Sans Paroles*

SUCH poignant feeling he could not express  
Except in music's universal tongue—  
*Chant sans paroles*, a wordless grief that wrung  
Tschaikowsky's heart for wrongs beyond redress:  
Stark poverty, imprisonment, duress—  
Man's inhumanity to man, far-flung  
And ancient even when the world was young—  
Dark tragedies of might and selfishness:

The peasants gather from the fields of toil;  
But now the Russian sun no longer shines;  
Ten thousand miles of frozen, bloodstained soil,  
To wretched exile in Siberian mines.  
The speechless stars look down through blinding tears  
And count the hours crawling into years.



## *Wagner*

HE knew them all—Beethoven, Bach, Mozart—  
Fugues, oratorios and symphonies—  
Franz Schubert's songs and Verdi's tragedies,—  
He knew and loved them as transcendent art,  
Yet he remained unfellowshipped, apart,  
And dreamed of old Teutonic deities—  
The Rhinegold myth, the Siegfried victories,  
That touched with fire his genius and his heart.

And then he wrought as none had dared before  
His operas in crashing melodies  
And magic inharmonious harmonies  
Of instrument and song, and durst explore  
Regions where mortal man had never trod,  
Inhabited by gnome and demigod.



# *The Muse of Architecture*

## I

I MET her on the great Acropolis  
Amid the ruins of the Parthenon.  
As pale as frozen Grief she gazed thereon:  
"The richest jewel in my crown was this."  
I saw the simple Doric edifice  
As Phidias left it, gleaming in the sun,  
As she took broken fragments, one by one,  
And pressed each with a silent, lingering kiss.  
  
And then I knew the pain that pierced her heart,  
Remembering what had been, but now was gone:  
The Propylaea and Erechtheion,  
The little temple, Wingless Nike—art  
Creations each without a counterpart  
That any eye has ever looked upon.

## II

I spoke: "You must not grieve and suffer thus.  
You loved the beauty of the Parthenon,  
But yonder lies the Bay of Phaleron,  
And toward the east is Mount Pentelicus.  
We still have Homer and Theocritus,  
And Sappho, Pindar and Anacreon;  
We may see Aphrodite any dawn  
New risen from the sea, voluptuous."  
  
But she refused thus to be comforted.  
"The gods alone know why man still blasphemes:  
The English abbeys and pathetic Rheims  
Are nothing now but ugly scars," she said,  
"Where erstwhile shrines of beauty stood instead.  
They haunt me now like nightmares in my dreams."



## *Faith*

I saw gaunt women toiling in the field,  
And heard the *caw caw* of a hungry crow,  
Who watched the poor things hilling row on row  
Expecting no more than a scanty yield.  
A weary mother dropped her hoe and kneeled  
And asked the unseen Father to bestow  
His blessings that enough of beans might grow,  
And that her little Johnny might be healed.

The sun went down; the lone crow flew away;  
The toilers shouldered hoes and left for home.  
I doubted that there was sufficient loam  
To sprout a bean in that thin yellow clay.  
But Johnny's now in school, and by some means  
That soil produced a bumper crop of beans.



## *Pavlowa*

AN old Cremona yearning o'er the scene,  
The rhythmic play of weird, dissolving light,  
The will-o'-the-wisp that haunted ancient night,  
Elusive wraith; an iridescent sheen  
Of turquoise, amethyst, and opaline;  
A gauzy dragonfly in airy flight,  
A shimmering hummingbird—enchanted sprite,  
Great Pavlowa, the Russian Fairy Queen!

She floated softly through the melting air,  
And poised in space upon her magic toe,  
And spun a breathless minute balanced there,  
Then like a wing-ed arrow from a bow,  
She vanished where no mortal eye could see—  
Reincarnated muse, Terpsichore!

## *Freedom Is Life*

HE had a passion for the good green earth—  
The Alma Mater of all living things—  
For leafing woodland and for flash of wings;  
The yellow crocus at its early birth,  
And jonquils for their jollity and mirth;  
Anemones around the April springs,—  
A hundred other little fairy things  
He loved and counted as of priceless worth.

No less his fellow man. But even more  
He hated War—that fiend from Hell—but when  
The yellow traitor tried to close the door  
To Freedom, he exchanged the poet's pen  
For Gideon's flaming sword and fiercely swore  
That Tyranny should never rise again.

## *Solitude*

To live alone where man nor beast has stood,  
More than a thousand miles from any home;  
To walk at night the catacombs of Rome,  
Or dwell within some deep death-haunted wood;  
To feel like Bonaparte with power endued,  
Yet doomed to sleep beneath the starry dome,  
And listen to the ocean chafe and foam,—  
Not this, not all of these, is solitude.

But oh, to be alone within the hive  
Of teeming life, where thousands live and move  
And have their shallow beings,—there to strive  
With doubt and faith, and feel the soul expand  
Beyond the utmost reach of those we love,  
And know that they can never understand.



## *Sea Gulls*

ALL day I watched the gulls. They wheeled and dipped  
And shot like noiseless rockets through the air;  
Or motionless as death, poised unaware  
Of gravity in earth or sea; then slipped  
Sidewise this way and that, and fiercely whipped  
The wind with palpitating wings to bear  
Them quickly out of sight in midday glare,  
Or through an opening where the sky was ripped.

Sometimes a gull is sonneteer, and line  
By line climbs to an almost dizzy height,  
Writing the octave in his upward flight,  
Then undulates in sestet to the brine.  
Did Petrarch learn the rhythm of his art,  
Watching the gulls in some ocean mart?

## *The Brown Thrasher*

SUCH fickle humor and such nimble wit!  
Titania with the love juice in her eyes  
Doting on stupid Bottom; Jacques, the wise,  
And Touchstone, just a clown. I watch you flit  
From branch to branch, while on this knoll I sit  
And listen to your changing melodies,  
Sounding the chords of human sympathies  
In phrasing exquisite and infinite:  
The pound of flesh Shylock demanded whole;  
The tragic love of two Verona youth;  
The thankless child, sharper than serpent's tooth;  
The fratricide that crushed young Hamlet's soul;  
Poor Desdemona and the Jealous Moor;  
The rooted sorrow naught but Death could cure.



## *Penelope*

I WONDER why Ulysses is the theme  
So many modern poets love to sing?  
Or what distinguished him—this crafty king  
Of Ithaca—except his tricky scheme  
Of taking Troy, in which he did blaspheme  
The gods, who doomed him to long wandering?  
Do they recall Calypso and his fling  
With her of whom he never ceased to dream?

If I but had the poet's frenzied fire,  
I'd sing a ballad of Penelope,  
And set it to the music of her loom,  
Of how her strength withstood the mad desire  
Her beauty roused in lords who thronged her room,  
While she sat weaving with her heart upon the sea.



## *Siren Sea*

SHE can not hide her beauty, clothed or bare,  
A raging Gorgon or a nymph asleep,  
Or when Apollo rising from the deep  
Flings powdered gold upon her hair.  
Sometimes she's dark, sometimes she's debonair—  
A tender mother crooning to her child—  
A mad bacchante dancing free and wild—  
A luring beauty tempting unaware.

Pirates have followed her to endless night,  
A million ships have dueled for her hand,  
And many monarchs, petty kings, and grand,  
Have tried to woo her as they would a sprite;  
But she is fancy free and still unwed,  
And wears a thousand jeweled crown upon her head.

## *Immortality*

You ask me what is immortality.  
Well, listen now to yonder mockingbird.  
It is the self-same song blind Homer heard  
While wandering round the blue Aegean Sea.  
No, not the very bird; but life goes on  
From egg to feathered throat, an endless chain  
Of death and resurrection, loss and gain,—  
A million years of sunset and of dawn.

Poets survive in songs that they have sung.  
A thousand generations hence will know  
Lanier and Keats and Edgar Allan Poe  
As if each were a living tongue.  
The creator of beauty is a part  
Of all his work and lives forever in his art.

## *At the Home of Mary and Martha*

THE Master loved this home in Bethany.  
The blind and clamoring crowds laid heavy toll  
Upon his strength, and here his aching soul  
Found rest and solace from the sophistry  
Of Pharisee; and here he came to hold  
Sweet converse on the sheer simplicity  
Of faith and worship, and the alchemy  
Of Love in changing base things into gold.

But Martha, cumbered with the heavy work,  
Complained that Mary sat at Jesus' feet  
And heard, while she prepared and served the meat.  
The Master spoke: "You, Martha, never shirk  
A duty, nor is Mary now remiss;  
But one thing's needed most, and she has chosen this."



## *To Julia Boynton Green*

AFTER READING HER "THIS ENCHANTING COAST"

WHOEVER reads your "This Enchanting Coast,"  
Will ever after have a deeper love  
Of Beauty, which the poet holds above  
All other riches and is uppermost  
Forever in his ardent quest of God.  
Your eagle eye discovers purple heights  
Where wild Sierras chant their priestly rites  
And all the haunts where Beauty's feet have trod.

With ear atilt you hear the dryads sing;  
You see the maenads in their frenzied dance  
With many colored petals in their hair.  
The snowy Yucca blooms, the Harebells ring,  
The lupines flaunt a mad extravagance.  
And reading I become a multimillionaire.



*V I*

*E P I Q U O G U E*





## *Dreams*

I LOVED HER AGED CHESTNUT TREE  
CLOSE TO A PLACID STREAM,  
IN WHOSE SWEET SHADE WE USED TO SIT  
AND NURSE A BLISSFUL DREAM—

A DREAM OF ROMANCE, LOVE AND PEACE,  
WITH EVERY PEOPLE FREE,  
AND ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH  
DEVOID OF ENMITY.

SINCE THEN TWO WORLD WARS—MILLIONS SLAIN—  
AND RACE HOSTILITY;  
LAWS OFTEN FLOUTED AND DEFIED,  
AND BROKEN RECKLESSLY.

WE TOIL AND SWEAT THROUGH SIXTY YEARS,  
THEN BODY, BONE AND BRAIN  
RETURN TO EARTH IN MOULD AND DUST—  
BUT DREAMS, THANK GOD, REMAIN.

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